THE SEVEN HOUSES

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE glowing red ball shot straight up with a dull swish, then seemed to hesitate, and finally ascended a little higher in snaky lines, to break up into a multitude of bullets of all colours of the rainbow. These pyrotechnic bodies sank gracefully earthwards, burst and scattered fiery rain over the trees of the Kahlenberg, which stood out boldly against the sky. The Stefaniewarte could easily be seen in the bright light.

"Bravo, Stuwer! Bravo, Stuwer!" cried several people lolling in the windows of the First House.

At their doors, in the fields opposite, on the fences of their gardens, or in the windows of the bare and ugly tenement houses, stood, sat, squatted or lay the tenants of the "Seven Houses."

The Feast of St. Anne, in accordance with annual tradition, was being celebrated on the Kahlenberg with fireworks and a beauty competition.

The fireworks were a gratis entertainment for those Viennese who were unable to take part in the festivities themselves.

The market gardeners of Brigittenau—early risers who began their work at daybreak or started for market about midnight and therefore always went to bed at nightfall, had stayed up to-night not to miss the spectacle provided for them by Father Stuwer, the celebrated firework specialist of Vienna in the 'seventies and 'eighties.

The windows of the Kahlenberg restaurant were brilliantly lighted. Heiligenstadt and Mussdorf seemed to be lost in slumber, and the monastery on Leopoldsberg was wrapped in mysterious darkness.

The porters of the Seven Houses stood in their clogs at the gates, clutching their keys. Their ears were pricked and they were not listening to the rockets ceaselessly ascending Heavenwards with a roar, because their whole interest was absorbed in "lock-up." When the hour of ten was struck

by the church clock in Brigittaplatz, they turned the mighty keys in the locks, and anyone returning late, even one minute late, had to pay a late-fee.

This species of tribute had been made a permanent rule by the stewards, who were heartily loathed by all Vienna. In the poorer quarters the fee was five kreuzer a head to midnight, and ten afterwards. These Cerberuses strictly insisted on their full tariff.

When the church clock began to strike there was a general move. To the great displeasure of the stewards no one stopped out. Amid much grumbling they locked up.

The window-sills of the Seven Houses were now black with people. The fireworks, the lovely summer night, and the fragrant breeze from the hills of the Wiener Wald, kept everyone awake.

Lightning flashed over the Hermanns-Kogel, and a curious rustling noise could be heard coming from Döbling Gardens and the Danube Canal.

The "boys" and Old Man Gustel, singing lustily, appeared round the corner of the Wenzelgasse, making for the Seven Houses. They had helped themselves to a double litre of beer at Ninnvischter's and were very happy.

"Da schaut der Steffel lächend
Auf uns nieder,
Und's denkt sich still
Der stolze Dom :
Das ist mein Wien,
Die Stadt Für Lieder
*Am schönen blauen Donaustrom."**

The boys' voices, blending in double harmony, rang clear as a bell. The occupants of the windows enjoyed listening to them.

"Bravo, sing us another," yelled Emmerich Zeiner from the third floor of the Sixth House.

"Shut up, you lousy fools ; people want to sleep," grumbled the Bohemian porteress of the Seventh House.

"Shut up yourself," roared old Felbermayer from a window of the Sixth House, "it's perfectly lovely ; listen yourself, you Bohemian nanny goat, and you won't stop the lads singing."

*"The Steffel smiles down upon us : the proud Minster muses in silence. That is my Vienna, city of songsters, on the lovely blue Danube."

"Yah, yah," came in chorus from the windows.

The sky above the Kahlenberg was tinted with a thousand fiery colours. The conclusion of the firework display was on a scale of such magnificence that everyone gasped with admiration. The quarrel between the porteress and choleric old Felbermayer was forgotten.

Hansl Neier was leaning over the fence of the maize field opposite the Seventh House, and began to hum the song of Archduke Johann. One of his lungs was affected, half-eaten away by tuberculosis, in fact, and very often the sixteen-year-old lad found it very difficult to breathe; but when he felt like singing his debilitated vocal organs seemed to acquire a mysterious and miraculous power and endurance.

The quarrelsome porteress seemed to be on the point of renewing the brawl, but Karl Pschik told her to hold her tongue.

Frau Wunderer relapsed into silence. She was not anxious to have any trouble with the rich nurseryman. She bought her vegetables from them cheaply, and her husband, the hunchback Pepi Wanderer, who for some mystical reason—or perhaps no reason at all—was always nicknamed "Old Greasy" by the nurserymen, to the great sorrow of his quarrelsome spouse, was very popular with them by reason of his excellent voice and love of singing.

"Ja, wo i gehund steh,
Tuat mir mei' Herzerl weh,
*Oh, du mei' Steirerland."**

Hansl Neier's weak voice gained increasing strength. "Greasy" now thrust his wife aside from the window and joined in:

"Dort, wo dös Büchserl knallt,
Und wo der Gamsbock fallt,
Dort, wo mei' guter Herzog Johann is."†

Hansl's fresh young tenor rang out clear, "Old Greasy" harmonized perfectly, and the yodel died away in an exultant trill.

All these simple folk had listened to the singers in pious silence. No other sound could be heard, but when the song was over a roar of applause came from every window.

*"Where e'r I am, I long for thee, my Styrian home."

†"Where the shots ring out and the chamois fall, there my good Duke Johann is."

"Bravo, Hansl! Bravo, Old Greasy! Bravo! Bravo!"

The enthusiasm was perfectly sincere, for the untrained and yet beautiful voices faultlessly mastered these melodious songs in which the love of home breathes so strongly. This love of singing has been characteristic of the Viennese from the earliest times. Even if they have heard a song only once they can reproduce it correctly, in one, two, and even three parts, in their primitive, languorous and yet deeply moving fashion.

The night seemed to have become a thing of unrest.

Maxl Rauch came home drunk in a one-horse cab, accompanied by the merry Annerl Neier, and singing lustily:

"In der Liebe habi hör'n Sie,
Doch ein eigenes Malheur,
Weinen könti, zählt ich Thuen
Meine Abenteuer her:
Meine Erste war d' Sophie,
Schön und tugendhaft war sie;
Auf amol hat s' a Keilerei
Mit der Weana Polizei
Und man schickt s' per Wag'n nach Böhmen,
Denn von durt'n war sie her.
Oh Sophiederl, wanni alt war,
*Mi siechst ganz g'wiss nimmermehr."**

Maxl jumped joyfully out of the cab, swung Annerl up and put her down on the pavement after depositing another kiss on her lips.

"Now, Mr. Cabby, what do you want?" asked Maxl, while Annerl tugged untiringly at the bell-pull.

"Oh, I dunno. Whatever you think. I reckon we shan't need a judge?"

"Think a florin will be enough?"

"You ought to stick a few flins† on to that. It's not enough from Dornbach right out to Brigittenau, and, besides, I've got to get back to Erdberg."

"You needn't do that as far as I'm concerned. You can go and swing on that street lamp, or sleep on the grass, or try a bathe in the Danube."

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*"In the matter of love, mark you, I've had my own troubles. I could weep to tell you of all my adventures. My first was little Sophie; young and virtuous was she. One fine day she fell out with the Vienna police and was packed off to Bohemia, because that's where she hailed from. Oh, my Sophie, if I was old you'd certainly never see me again."

†Ten-kreuzer pieces.

"I'll give you street lamps. If you're stony, why don't you take a wheelbarrow and not a swell carriage."

"Good Lord!" yelled Maxl, cocking his hat over his left ear. "So that's what you call a swell carriage, is it? Why, if you took your pole out, the whole thing 'ud fall to bits."

The cabby thrust the paper florins into his large purse, spat contemptuously, smacked his lips, and called out as the carriage moved off:

"Yer dirty miserable rag-and-bone man, if I could catch you a good 'un I'd lay you out."

"Hold me back," yelled Maxl Rauch. "Hold me back, before I smash him up."

As no one came forward to hold the raging Maxl back, he decided to do so himself, and directed a fierce gaze upon the gate. He looked round everywhere but his Annerl had vanished. "Old Greasy" had meanwhile let her in and then locked the gate again.

"Hallo! What's become of the girl?"

"Gone home," "Old Greasy" called out. "But she said it's for you to pay the fine."

"The dirty little slut, she can pay it herself. Lettin' me take her out and then sneakin' off!"

And still the night knew no peace. There was a crash of glass in the first floor of the Fourth House, and the shattered fragments fell on to the pavement. A woman's voice screamed for help.

Martin Bierwolf had returned home unexpectedly from a journey into Upper Austria and found Ferdl Stiegler with his wife.

"Police! Help! Help!"

Many heads which had already found their pillows shot out of the windows, but only a few persons living in the same house as the surprised pair took the trouble to run to the tenement from which the cries for help proceeded. Out of the door rushed Ferdl Stiegler, a bloody knife in his hand. He gazed wildly about him, raised the knife threateningly, and yelled out.

"Get out of my light, or I'll carve you to ribbons."

Everyone made way for him. The murderer ran to the staircase where Franzl Dworczak tripped him up and Stiegler fell head over heels downstairs. He lay like a stone at the bottom. During his fall, the knife had penetrated his chest and pierced him to the heart.

In a room of the Bierwolf tenement above, Martin lay on the oilcloth cover of the old sofa. His face was deathly pale and he was moaning quietly, while he pressed a blood-stained handkerchief to his body.

His wife in a red petticoat was standing with wide-open eyes by the broken window and staring fixedly at her husband as he lay writhing in pain.

"Fetch the doctor or the ambulance men quick, or the man'll die," cried Reinagel, who had quickly tied a white apron over his linen pants. He ran downstairs. There some of the tenants were endeavouring to assist Ferdl Stiegler, who lay lifeless on the floor.

"Don't touch him," yelled Reinagel; "don't touch him till the police come. No one must touch him."

Before opening his shop in the Fourth House, Reinagel had been a policeman. He knew the proper procedure in such matters.

"Don't touch him," he repeated. "He's dead, and no one must touch him now."

The corridor was packed with a group of terror-stricken women. They whispered and cast reluctant glances at the corpse and the knife-handle projecting from its breast. A thin stream of crimson blood ran over the yellow squares of the Kehlheim flooring. The paraffin lamp, with a white protector, cast from the ceiling a trembling, ghostly light on the dead man.

"Open the door, Herr Schumacher!" Reinagel had hastily flung on his clothes. He meant to run himself to the police-station in the Raphaelgasse to get help and notify the authorities.

The steward fetched the key and Reinagel went down the street as fast as his bulky form would let him.

Not a soul was to be seen. Policemen never came near the Seven Houses at night, and only as far as the Gerhardusgasse in the daytime.

Reinagel's steps resounded on the granite pavement. He felt extremely important to be thus resuming his former position.

Peace was not destined to return to the Seven Houses that night.

On the second floor of the Seventh House, the sixteen-year-old Emilie Gürtler woke her mother.

"Mother, mother, wake up!"

"What is it? What's the matter? How late is it?"

"It's gone half-past eleven and I wanted to get a drink of water, and I looked in the kitchen and saw that Richard was not in bed."

Her mother looked up with anxious face.

"Perhaps he's in the lavatory outside?"

"No, I've had a look there. His clothes aren't there either. His boots aren't under the bed."

Frau Gürtler sat up in bed. Her husband awoke and asked in drowsy tones why she could not keep still.

"Get up, father. Richard's run away."

Gürtler shot up in bed.

"Are you daft? D'you mean to say the kid's not in?"

Frau Gürtler had run into the kitchen, and now came back, calling the boy's name in a voice choked with tears.

"Come out, Richard, come out. I know you're hiding. Stop your silly joke."

His father pulled on his nightgown while Emilie went into every room, looking under the beds and into the cupboards; then she ran out into the passage. The lad was nowhere to be seen.

Gürtler, fear clutching at his heart, put on his clothes. He went into the kitchen and roused Richard's brother—three years older—from a deep slumber.

"Get up, Adolf! Don't you hear?" He shook the sleepy boy and sat him up in the bed. "Adolf, where's Richard?"

"I don't know. He must be asleep."

"Use your eyes, man! Can't you see he isn't with you? When did he get up? Didn't you see him?"

"No, I went to sleep the minute I put my head down."

The mother sat in the parlour, weeping. Rosa, the second daughter, had come out of the bedroom. All of them were very worried about the youngest of the family.

"The lad'll bring me to the grave before he's finished," sobbed the mother.

"Mother, now I know where Hartl is. He's gone with the acrobats."

As these words were spoken, Gürtler entered the room. He caught his daughter by the arm.

"What makes you think Hartl has run away with the acrobats? They went away at least three days ago."

"He spent all his time with the Thima people. He can do a *luftla**, head-over-heels and cartwheels. He can walk on his hands, too. He must have learned all that with them. He's always been saying he means to be an acrobat."

"I'll lock up the house and go and look for the boy, and when I catch him I'll teach him a thing or two. The little wretch, to lead us such a dance."

"Don't do anything to him when you find him, Maxl," begged the mother. "My God, what *has* happened to him! Pr'aps he's drowned."

"But, mother, Hartl swims like a fish, and besides, what would he want to go to the Danube at night for?"

"Pr'aps somebody's kidnapped him," said Adolf, anxiously.

Gürtler stepped out into the warm summer night. He wondered which way to go. Then the sound of steps reached him. Several men came round the corner of the Wenzelgasse into the Burkhardtgasse. In the distance could be heard the shrill signal of the Vienna Ambulance Corps.

Gürtler leaned against the gate-post.

"Mary and Joseph!" he murmured. "They're bringin' the lad."

The ambulance came round the corner of the Materialplatz at a breakneck gallop, to the accompaniment of a shrieking whistle. The reins were splashed with foam and the horses' hoofs rang out on the stones.

Just before reaching the Seventh House the driver pulled them up sharp and the exhausted animals came to a stop with twitching flanks.

"Which is Number 10?"

Gürtler's lips trembled and his face turned deathly white. It was in vain that he tried to answer. His teeth chattered audibly, as if he had the ague.

Puffing and blowing, fat Reinagel came up with the Police-Inspector, two policemen and old Dr. Rosenthal, who had been hauled unceremoniously out of bed.

"Further on, further on," cried Reinagel to the driver. "It's the fourth gate."

Gürtler was almost fainting. What had happened? Wasn't the boy lying in the ambulance. He pulled himself together, seized the baker's arm and ran along with him. The words tumbled from his lips.

*Salto mortale.

"What's happened? Is my lad, my Richard . . .?"

"Why, haven't you heard, Herr Gürtler? That good-for-nothing lout, Ferdl Stiegler, has stabbed Martin Bierwolf. By the way, tell your wife she still owes me twenty kruezer for a loaf."

Gürtler, a figure of despair, stood at the door of the house of disaster. The Inspector and policemen, the doctor of the ambulance Corps, Dr. Rosenthal, and the conductor carrying the doctor's bag, rushed past him in a whirl. Thank God! His lad, his Hartl was not in the ambulance. But if not, where on earth had the ragamuffin got to? The anxious father pulled himself together. The sorrows of others took a back seat. He must find the runaway. His steps carried him back to the Seventh House.

Upstairs, Gürtler's wife and the two girls were anxiously looking out of the window. The shrill signals of the ambulance had drawn them to it. When the worried father came running under the lamp of Ratz's brandy and tobacco shop, his family recognized him.

"Father, father," cried Emilie, "what's happened? Is anything wrong with Hartl?"

Gürtler stopped.

"Are you mad to yell out in the street like that? You'll wake everybody up."

"Maxl," said Frau Gürtler softly, "where's the lad? What's the ambulance doing down there?"

"So there's been a row, has there? Leave me alone. I must go an' look for the lad Richard." Gürtler ran towards the Wenzelgasse and disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Frau Gürtler, shivering with fear, sat on the edge of the bed, each of her daughters clasping a hand. The woman's limbs seemed weighted with lead, and her heart was heavy with a sense of disaster. The boy was dead—of that she was convinced. To all the sorrows that time had brought her—a woman of means in days gone by—was now added the grief of the unruly behaviour of Richard, a boy not yet nine years old.

She had brought seventeen children into the world. All of them had first seen the light in an idyllic little village of the Waldviertel. There was no station or town for miles. Krems was a nine-hour drive southwards, and little Gföhl

lay eight kilometres to the north, behind the ridge of the Mannhartsgebirge.

The solitary village inn, and its one trading concern of any size, had certainly meant plenty of hard work, but also peace and prosperity. A terrible blow had fallen upon the prolific couple when smallpox carried off eight children within a few weeks. A year later twins died of the same disease. The death of the ten children turned the Gürtlers against the village in which they had previously known so much happiness. Relatives pressed them to sell the business and start a new life in Vienna on the proceeds. But parting from the old, idyllic home had been a desperately hard business.

It seemed to Resi Gürtler as if she were taking leave of life itself, when all the furniture, beds, and other belongings worth removing were at length stowed away on two great wagons and the peasants gathered round for a last farewell. Vienna, the great city, represented a nameless terror, for the little village had been a Paradise to her.

Schipfel, the thirteen-year-old house-dog, ran whining round the wagons. The children had twice already hauled him up beside them on the mattresses, and each time the terrier had jumped down again, yelping nervously. The animal felt instinctively that the family's exodus boded them no good.

Therese Gürtler was crying, and when the wagons climbed the hill towards Ober-Meisling she took a last look behind her and then buried her face in her apron.

Schipfel was still lying at the door of the inn, gazing after the two wagons with his large clever eyes. His primitive intelligence could not grasp that this time the whole family had really gone for ever. His young master had often left the village and frequently taken the children with him, but for them all to go was something quite new to him. There was something strange about it. The dog ran into the parlour, then into the house, and back to the front of the house.

Maxl, the Gürtler's eldest son, turned back at his mother's request to fetch Schipfel. The dog jumped up at him in joyful excitement and ran with him to the wagons. It frisked, barking round the horses' feet, and seemed to be quite reconciled to the move.

Suddenly it gave a shrill yelp. It had got under the

wheels of the first wagon, in which the children were sitting.

Schipfel's sufferings were soon over. His fine, loyal eyes turned a long lingering look on his little mistress in whose lap he lay, and he bade farewell to the folk whose loved and trusted companion he had been for thirteen years.

The weeping children buried their faithful comrade and playmate under an oak by the side of the road to Unter-Meisling.

"Maxl, you'll see it means bad luck that Schipfel's dead," said Frau Gürtler amidst her tears ; she could not take her eyes off the oak beneath which lay the dog once so lively and now so still.

Frau Gürtler heaved a deep sigh ; her daughters pressed closer to her, put their arms round her, and spoke words of comfort.

"Richard's probably run away to the acrobats, Mummy. Father'll certainly find him to-morrow, or he'll come back by himself."

In the mother's heart all the pain and griefs of the past years suddenly came to life again.

Vienna had brought no happiness. The general store opened on the mean Taborstrasse had done badly ; they had lost all their money they had brought with them, and the influences of the great city made themselves felt. The eldest boy fell in love with a silly girl who deceived him. In shame and sorrow the young man hanged himself in the garret.

Popular superstition once more received confirmation.

On the night when the twenty-year-old Maxl Gürtler took his own life, hailstones fell as big as doves' eggs, and a storm raged and shrieked over the spurs of the Alps and between Leopoldsberg and Bisamberg where the mighty Danube clears its foaming path.

"Somebody's hanged himself," said the Viennese with a frightened glance at the dark window-panes against which the rain beat in streams.

Father Gürtler went to pieces after his son's suicide ; the declining business had to be sold, and the family removed to the Seven Houses, in the horticultural Brigittenau. A laundry was bought with what remained of their money, and it provided a bare [illegible]ing.

Three years after Maxl's suicide the second son, Ignaz, disappeared. As a student he had got involved in political activities with a band of anarchists. When the police raided the secret meeting-place of the revolutionaries, the list of members which included the name of Ignaz Gürtler was found. It was with the greatest difficulty that the young man escaped abroad. He had never been heard of again.

A boy born in Vienna died in childhood.

The Gürtler family just about managed to make ends meet. The youngest boy Richard—Hartl for short—was a constant source of worry to them. Not that there was anything bad about the lad, but simply that he was hopelessly wild and up to any mad prank. He hated school, and loved roving round the nursery gardens and meadows by the Yägerhaus or in Zwischenbrücken. Everyone liked Hartl Gürtler, though regarding him as a thorough young scamp. Whenever a window was broken and the perpetrator was not to be found, the owner went straight to Mother Gürtler and told her that Hartl had done it. Frau Gürtler paid up and the lad received a whipping, undeservedly often enough. In the nursery gardens, which formed two-thirds of Brigittenau, there were large areas of cucumber and other beds under glass. One of Hartl's masterpieces was the trick of using some hiding-place to skim smooth pebbles over the glass in such a way as to leave a cracked pane behind whenever it bounced. One throw often left ten to fifteen broken panes behind it.

Whippings did little to reform Hartl. He had forgotten everything in a few hours and embarked on some new prank. Although he was only eight, other lads four or five years older followed him. He was a very nimble fighter and did not fear the strongest boys. He had picked up all the tricks of brawling and rowdyism by watching grown-ups, and was a genius in attack. He was a past-master in the special art of tripping-up. When a fight began, he would press close against his opponent, slip a foot behind his legs unobserved and then catch him a violent thump on the chest. The enemy toppled over backwards, and then Hartl left him no time to rise or counter-attack but flung himself on his prostrate foe and battered him unmercifully with his little fists.

Each spring, strolling-players and conjurers pitched their circus in the field by the Seventh House. August Thima,

the manager of the show, had chosen Brigittenau for his quarters.

The spectacles were childish enough, but they had their public. Many big turns had begun their career in these circuses.

All the boys of the neighbourhood went "stage-struck" and wanted to be acrobats or clowns. The high dung-heaps of the nurseries, the adjoining fields, and the back-yards of the Seven Houses, became their practice-grounds.

Acrobatic tricks were practised on the dung-heaps because they were springy. To be able to do cartwheel head-over-heels, the pole-jump and the *liftler*—as the double somersault was called—became the loftiest ambition of every lad. Hartl learned the lot with the greatest of ease.

CHAPTER TWO

WHILST a heavy-hearted mother was oppressed with anxiety for her child and his father roved aimlessly through the silent night before turning into the police-station to report the boy's disappearance, a cheerful ragamuffin, carrying a small bundle, was wandering through the deserted and ill-lighted streets and alleys of Vienna. Whenever the youngster caught the glint of the metal half-moon on a policeman's collar he hid in a doorway or behind a tree and even ordinary civilians were avoided as far as possible.

Hartl Gürtler ran down the desolate Matzleinsdorfer Strasse as hard as his small legs would carry him. He had but one thought, one wish—to lose not a moment in joining the "Thima Troupe", which had broken up camp by the Seven Houses as a result of poor takings, and vanished to Vöslau-bei-Baden to display its art to the visitors and excursionists at the spa in the hope of earning a rich reward.

Hartl, who had spent every spare moment haunting the artistes and their entourage, knew all about it. He had kept his eyes and ears open to good effect, and heard where the troupe intended to go.

The boy's head was a whirl of confused thought. Fear that the "Manager" would send him home again almost made his heart stop beating. Then his mother's face appeared

before his eyes. Would she be glad to find her nipper gone ? There would be no more broken window-panes to pay for. Why, when he became a manager himself, and his mother sat in the box-office, and his sisters went round collecting with the wooden plate, he would break as many windows and cucumber-frames as he jolly well liked. The boys would have to go and find him pebbles, nice smooth ones, the sort that bounced beautifully from frame to frame, breaking pane after pane with a crash.

Hartl laughed to himself, produced a hunk of dry sausage—which he had procured for his journey from Munzig's in the Gerhardusgasse the night before—from his trouser pocket and took a mighty bite. He suddenly remembered how the year before he had conspired with Franzl Wondraschek against old Weichselbraun. Hartl was going to spend the first two weeks of his holidays with an aunt at Zwettl. It was arranged that two days after his departure Franzl Wondraschek should "skim" a stone over the frames, smashing as many panes as possible, and then promptly vanish.

Franzl had carried out his part of the bargain. As Hartl had expected, old Weichselbraun had come running round to Frau Gürtler to claim damages for eight broken panes.

"But when did he break your frames ?" Hartl's mother had asked.

"Just now, only ten minutes ago."

"That's funny," had been Frau Therese Gürtler's reply. "Now I'd never have thought my lad was so strong—and such an artist."

"What d'you mean ?" retorted the gardener roughly. "Your kid, the little blackguard—I'll pull his ears off when I catch him in my garden, or knocking round the dung-heap—has just been up to his stone-throwing tricks."

"All I mean," said Frau Gürtler with a smirk, "is it's really a wonderful feat to chuck stones from Zwettl to Vienna."

Weichselbraun took his pipe out of his mouth ; the right corner of his lower lip drooped, and he gazed at the woman in very sheepish fashion.

"So you think you're going to fool me ? You can just pay up or I'm off to the kid's school-teacher and the police as well. . . ."

"I'll pay up right enough, but you've first got to prove

to me that my Hartl, who went to stay with his aunt at Zwettl two days ago, has been throwing stones from there into your garden."

Hartl tramped on. He chuckled to himself and ate the sausage, including the skin and the thin string with which the end was tied up. He would very much have liked to have left some of his bosom friends with similar plans to execute, but in that case he would have betrayed his intentions. No, no, he must be careful. No one must know where he had gone. They must not find him before he became a troupe-leader, and could do the giant jump.

He began to remember all the wicked tricks he had ever played. In summer he had spent all his time in the market-gardens. Although the gardeners grumbled at him and frequently boxed his ears, they all had to put up with the smart lad on account of his nimble wits.

Most of the owners of the great market-gardens had removed into Vienna from the Waldviertel and Retz districts. The ground landlord was the monastery of Klosterwenberg, which refused to sell its land for building purposes.

These Lower-Austrian nurserymen were hard-working folk but appallingly mean. They generally brought their employees with them from home, and in summer they often took on schoolboys as auxiliaries who were prepared to help in the gardens for a few kreuzer.

Hartl Gürtler was at home in any garden. He had been employed by Jackish Weichselbraun, Stummerer, Pschik, Poppenberger, Egolf, and others. He was never at a loss for an answer, was good at weeding, and knew how to plant lettuce and drive the blindfolded horse that went round in circles to work the pump.

All these gardeners kept savage dogs to guard their plants. Hartl was on the best of terms with these four-legged custodians. The ferocious beasts never touched him. In the middle of the night he often slipped out of the window of the ground-floor corridor, climbed over the garden fence, and brought the yelping dogs to heel with a low clucking sound. The barking immediately stopped, and the four-legged guardians, their hinds half busily wriggling, came up to the boy and jumped up at him, licking his face.

On these nights Hartl stole enough vegetables to fill

a basket or two, hid them behind a bush and then quietly returned. He had always inquired of his mother the previous evening what sort of vegetables there would be for dinner next day. The nightly excursion depended upon the answer. The following morning he asked his mother for the money, took the market basket and brought back the wares appropriated during the night. The money went on all sorts of rubbish.

He often found himself in an awkward fix. For instance, if his mother told him at night that there would be turnips next day, he would secure a good supply of the vegetables in question and remove it to his secret store. Unfortunately, it sometimes happened that next day his mother changed her mind and chose green peas instead of turnips. Hartl would then scratch his close-cropped head and find himself compelled to leave the turnips where they were. On other occasions he ignored his mother's instructions entirely and brought unwanted provisions from his bush. The sequel was a thrashing. Hartl kept his clenched fist in his pocket and yelled as if he were being killed. In his fist were the kreuzer—his ill-gotten gains—and even as he was being smitten he was planning how he would spend them.

The little wanderer came to a halt at a barn on the Triester Strasse. It was a tired boy that crept into a great heap of straw.

The myriad stars in the sky were slowly beginning to turn pale, and eastwards across the Danube day was breaking. The monument of the Weaver on the Cross, on the site of Old Vienna's place of execution raised a ghostly silhouette against the sky. The moon was losing colour. The shrill whistle of Südbahn engines shunting could be heard. A gentle wind made its presence felt, and a pungent earthy smell wafted down from the vine-terraces into Vienna. The lofty tower of St. Stephen's gazed down upon the sleeping city.

A weary little boy slept in the pile of straw. He was breathing peacefully, and a wily smile made the corners of his mouth twitch. No doubt he was dreaming of some harmless prank. The morning air was cold as it came through the loosely-packed straw. It made him shiver: he curled up closer, snatched a handful of straw and pulled it over him as his lips murmured: "Cover me up, mum, I'm cold."

How gladly would his mother have covered him up if

she had only known where to find him ! In his ignorance he had no notion what sorrow he was bringing upon her.

Away in Brigittenau a white-faced woman was sitting at a window of the Seven Houses in the Burkhardtgasse. Her tear-stained eyes were fixed on the distant hills emerging from the grey light of morning. Seventeen children had she borne, but only four were left to her. Twelve lay under the sod, the thirteenth had vanished and nothing had ever been heard of him again. And now the youngest boy had run away or some catastrophe had overtaken him. Could Christ the Lord have suffered more from the crown of thorns than this martyred mother ?

The two little girls were sleeping at their mother's feet. They had made their beds on the floor and laid their heads in her lap.

Frau Gürtler's hands gently stroked their heads while the tears ran down her cheeks and wet her daughters' hair.

In the corner of the sofa sat Gürtler. His breast heaved as in heavy sleep. His heart almost stopped at the thought that something dreadful must have happened to his boy. He clenched his teeth to suppress a rising sob. The corners of his mouth twitched.

In the distance could be heard the barking of dogs ; the wind blew down from the crest of the Kahlenberg, a bird piped in the acacias, and a cock crowed lustily, announcing the new day.

"Dear Father in Heaven, I pray Thee bring us the lad, our Hartl, safe and sound home again. O Lord, have I not been punished enough ? Father of Heaven, bring my child back to me."

Such was the father's secret prayer. His hands beat upon his breast to prevent him crying aloud.

The death bell tolled from the tower of the Brigitta church, for Martin Bierwolf had succumbed to his wounds an hour before.

CHAPTER THREE

ABOUT twelve o'clock the little truant, Richard Gürther, was awakened by a monotonous drone, the Litany, punctuated by the drowsy, nasal tones of the woman who lead the singing. He stretched himself, and

a wisp of hay got into his nostrils. He whirled his hands about with rage.

"Lemme alone!" he cried. "Stop fooling; stop your tickling!"

His little hands beat the straw; his mouth was full of dust, which made him cough; and he awoke.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us."

The prayer rang out, to the accompaniment of an incomprehensible murmur.

Hartl worked his way out of the straw. He gazed about him in amazement. Everything was still a mystery. Where was he? How had he got here? Gradually he began to remember that he had run away from home the previous night. He was frightened to death. What had he done? How furious his father would be, and how his mother would beat him!

In his childish simplicity, it never occurred to Hartl that his parents had good cause to be angry with him. He did not realize the consequences of his ill-considered act, and saw nothing wrong in it.

In the street outside a long procession was passing in the bright sunshine. At its head was a small acolyte in a white surplice, carrying a long black staff at the top of which was a silver cross with the Saviour.

Behind the boy came a priest in plain vestments, with an open breviary in his hand. His eyes were fixed on the book while his lips moved almost imperceptibly.

The priest was followed by two men carrying banners of the Society of St. Boniface, of which the persons constituting the procession—many women, but few men, and a handful of children—were members.

At the side was the woman leader who intoned the prayers in a drawling voice and was followed in unison by the rest of the company.

Hartl watched the procession attentively. He decided to join it. If he did so, no one would be likely to notice him. If anyone asked him any question he would have some handy explanation. Perhaps these people, too, were going to Baden, and he would reach his destination unchallenged. Or had he better go home? He plodded behind the praying women, whose long skirts raised the tawny dust.

The sun blazed fiercely in the summer sky; not a cloud could be seen.

No, he could certainly not go home. His mother would give him a fearful thrashing, and if he went back it would be all up with his career. He would never be manager of a troupe of acrobats performing in Brigittenanu and, perhaps, even in the Seventh District. And what about the giant jump? No, no! There could be no going back.

One thought, however, annoyed our Hartl greatly. Adolf would now annex all the lovely things he had left behind at home. There was his collection of bobbins, for example; and the colour-prints, and the big bag of marbles, both stone and glass ones of many hues.

"Oh, well," meditated Hartl, "when I come back as a manager I'll take them off him again; and he'll be jolly sorry for himself if there's a single picture, bobbin, or marble missing."

He reflected. Exactly how many pictures had he got. Goodness! he could not remember for certain! But there were fifty-two bobbins, including the two broken by that hulking lout, Franzl Gärtner. My, what a thrashing he'd given him!

Hartl's eyes shone. He wallowed in his memories. How Franzl had squealed! And did not his mother come running up quick! She was carrying a stick, and she swung it over Hartl, who was lying on her son; but he neatly slipped aside, so that the blow descended upon poor Franzl.

It was true that after Franzl's mother reported the matter to Frau Gürther and left the house, Hartl had received a horrid thrashing. But an opportunity for revenge had presented itself within five minutes, for as the smirking Franzl passed him he tripped him up and brought him down on his nose.

"No, I'll never let Franzl Gärtner come to any of my shows," murmured Hartl, "even if he offered to pay twenty kreuzer for a front seat." In fact, there was quite a number of boys he would not even let stand outside, not even if every man-jack of them paid his kreuzer into the plate when Emilie or Rosa went round with the hat. But Franzl Mondrashek, Schani Maschl, and Pepi Wunderer, these he would invite into the arena; they

need not even pay to go in. And as for Rosl Stollhof, she should have a free seat in the front row—but only if she stopped going about with Loisl Fasching.

There were a hundred and three marbles in the bag. The big glass one was broken a bit on one side through hard bouncing on the beastly paving-stones. No, indeed, Adolf would have to look out if any were missing.

Hartl tramped along bravely with the women who brought up the tail of the procession. The bottoms of their skirts were quite white with the swirling dust.

"Holy Mary, pray for us poor sinners," croaked their leader.

"For ever and ever, Amen," murmured her colleagues.

Hartl gripped his stomach tightly. There was a curious noise within. What on earth? He was hungry. He had nothing eatable left in his pockets. The sausage was all gone. He wondered whether Adolf would be having bread with his coffee to-day. In his trouser pocket five-and-thirty kreuzer were still to be found. One could live a nice long time on thirty-five kreuzer.

"Are you coming on the pilgrimage to Brunn?" a fat, wheezing woman suddenly asked Franzl, and tore him from his dreams.

"Course I am."

"All by yourself?" cross-examined the lady, hungering for conversation.

"Oh, no; my mother's up in front," the boy lied bravely.

At Liesing the procession took a noonday rest in the great Brauhaus garden. Hartl followed the rest under the shady chestnut trees. He sat next to the fat woman, in whose company he had spent the last half-hour in gay chatter.

"Aren't you going to your mother?" asked the kindly old dame.

"No, there's no room at her table"; Hartl jerked his thumb in the direction of the garden. After all, his mother must sit somewhere.

"All right, keep an eye on my things; don't let anyone steal anything," the fat woman requested, laid hands on a passing waiter, and called out: "Where's the ladies' room?"

She was given her directions and then disappeared,

not without a further injunction to the boy to look after her belongings.

A couple of excursionists, young newly-weds, or lovers, came up to the table and took the unoccupied seats.

The waiter came and, on request, recounted the splendours of the menu.

"All right, bring us two Spring-chicken and two beers. By the way, how much is the Spring-chicken?"

"Sixty kreuzer, with salad."

"Bring me a Spring-chicken, too," ordered Hartl, whose stomach had twitched, and whose mouth had watered, during the recital from the menu.

The waiter stared down at the boy.

"Will your mother let you?"

"'Course she will," replied Hartl brazenly.

"Perhaps you'd like a glass of small beer?"

"No, bring me a tankard of lager."

The fat woman returned to the table.

"The young gentleman has ordered a Spring-chicken," said the waiter to the pilgrim.

The fat woman laughed.

"Oh, well, let him enjoy himself; you'll get paid, all right. Bring me some soup, and pork to follow."

The waiter departed, reassured. He shook his head over this mother's foolish indulgence. She herself was having a slice of roast pork, while this young rascal of a son got a whole Spring-chicken and a tankard of lager on top! What was the world coming to?

Hartl munched with bursting cheeks. The old woman was delighted at his appetite, and the young couple laughed. The youngster smacked his lips, and almost snorted with his efforts; his mouth was wreathed in a foam of fat, which extended to his chin. The world had ceased to exist for him.

"Perhaps you'd like some apple fool now?" asked the waiter.

Hartl looked at the fat woman, who gave him an encouraging smile.

"All right, bring me a helping!" the boy called to the waiter.

It was impossible to get the whole Spring-chicken into the boy's small stomach, but he had no intention of leaving anything. He turned to his neighbour.

"Do you happen to have a bit of paper?"

"Here's a bit of newspaper." With these words, the young man handed a sheet across the table.

Hartl carefully wrapped up the remains in the newspaper. He gulped down the apple fool, and then slid from his seat.

"I'll just take it to mother, and then come back."

"Can't you finish your beer?" asked the fat woman.

"Can't manage it. It's so bitter."

Hartl forced his way among the chairs and tables. When he had almost reached the end of the garden, he looked round for a way out. The old girl would pay all right if the waiter insisted on his money. There was a gap in the fence separating the gardens from the brewery. In a trice the boy and his parcel in which the remains of the chicken were lovingly preserved were through the hole; he went straight across the yard into the street. There the young "bilker" turned down a side street which led to a vineyard.

A few swift leaps carried Hartl from the vicinity of the Liesing Bräuhausrestaurant at the same time that a violent altercation arose between the waiter and the fat woman on the subject of his crime. There was frantic, but vain, searching for the boy and his mother. The Liesing police intervened, took all particulars of the occurrence, and a statement from the corpulent pilgrim, who poured forth a stream of primitive Viennese abuse. Peace was only restored when several other pilgrims and the venerable priest had certified that Frau Hebamme* Hinterhuber had not suddenly given birth to an eight- to ten-year-old son either in Vienna or on the way.

Meanwhile, Hartl was far away from Liesing. He walked very fast, and often turned round anxiously to see whether anyone was following him. Fear lent wings.

It was only when the boy had run through Perchtoldsdorf and reached a small clearing in a peat moss that he flung himself down in the high grass, breathing hard. Using his little parcel as a pillow, he blinked at the blue sky above.

"If that old crow gets hold of me, she'll have me locked up," Hartl whispered to himself. But he soon forgot

*Midwife.

the Liesing incident and immediately indulged in his favourite game of day-dreams.

What fun he could have if he were on the Brigittenau side of the Danube Canal just now; he could just jump into the foaming water and swim across to the Heiligenstadt side!

How often had Hartl done so! He would suddenly feel the urge in the very middle of his game. Game and friends were left behind. He just ran to the water and swam across to the other side. The boy loved his Vienna, the city of his childhood, more than anything else on earth. He was always yearning for the hills, and he had often taken solitary tours from the Kahlenberg.

His memory turned to the big wood-yard in Heiligenstadt.

The mountains of timber, the great piles of planks stacked pyramid-wise, and the long naked tree-trunks, became something quite different in Hartl's eyes.

The planks were ramparts against the Turks, who were besieging Vienna once again after an interval of four hundred years. The tree-trunks were the great cannon on the old walls and bastions.

In the little houses of Heiligenstadt, with their mysterious courtyards, he had roamed with eager curiosity and built up his own romance.

On those days of gallant adventure the sun had shone down with the same fierce intensity as now. Hartl remembered that well enough.

The heavy drays stood idle at the doors of the inns in Heiligenstädter Strasse. The great Pinzgau horses shook their brass-studded harness and thrust their fine heads into the fodder trough. The golden hay was crunched beautifully between their teeth.

The drivers sat under the old acacia trees at the door and shovelled the roast potatoes that accompanied their pork in great heaps into their mouths. A double-litre jug of small beer washed away the fragments and grease from lips and moustache: the vessel was passed from hand to hand.

Before Hartl's very eyes the old Vienna inn had mysteriously changed into an *estancia* on the South-American pampas. The drays became a line of wagons scientifically drawn up by pioneers; the Pinzgau horses

turned into fiery mustangs; and pock-marked Zinner-Motzl, the driver, would have been ready with a heavy clout or two had he known that the boy had transformed him into a drunken *vaquero*. But old Motzl merely blew the froth from his long moustache, and then blew his nose in the most natural fashion—in which the use of the civilized handkerchief played no part. The corner of his blue apron was of distinct assistance.

The boy's day-dream carried him further: to Döbling, with all its treasures of gardens and flowers—the Döbling of the great artists and musicians. The divine breath of true art pulsated behind old walls, and the leaves sang softly of great days long past and the creation of immortalities for eternity.

Hartl had often gone for walks there with his uncle, the Domprobst*. More artist than ecclesiastical dignitary, the venerable gentleman found in the music of Beethoven solace and compensation for his celibacy. He had made it his business to lead Hartl, his favourite nephew, out of the morass of ignorance and the dull monotony of everyday life into the realm of the noblest arts.

This business was only partially to Hartl's liking.

The boy was teachable enough in everything not appertaining to dry schoolbook knowledge. Everything relating to music, particularly Viennese music, and the stage, had a magical charm for him. To be strictly truthful, Hartl preferred plebeian tunes, not to mention rustic ditties to the music of Beethoven. On school holidays he tore out of the house and ran to the Hofburg. There he attended the changing of the guard, knew all the regiments and conductors by name, and listened piously to the playing of the three pieces in the courtyard.

These excursions were often followed by a welting when he got home, but for the pleasure of seeing Komczak or Meister Ziehrer he was ready to endure the worst.

Hartl opened his eyes and sniffed up the air. There was a fragrant smell of flowers, grass, and trees. He wondered whether they were still thinking of him at home. He never suspected that his parents' hearts were torn with cruel anxiety for him and that they mourned for him as dead.

*Provost of the Cathedral.

On the morning after the night of terror, Schani Hashka had found Hartl's cap by the bank of the Danube Canal. He recognized his friend's headgear, ran with it straight to the absentee's mother, and shouted through the door:

"Frau Gürtler, Hartl's drowned; I've found his cap by the Danube!"

Hartl's mother went into hysterics, and it was hours before Doctor Rosenthal could bring her round. To her, it was beyond dispute that her boy was dead.

Hartl had clasped his hands behind his head and yawned wearily. A rough voice woke him from his dreams.

"Get up, you dirty young thief! You'll get your head smacked if you tread down my grass!"

Hartl was on his feet in a moment. He stared in bewilderment at the farmer, who gave him a kick in the ribs.

"What are you after, you young devil? Clear out quick, or I'll rip your guts out!"

Hartl slowly drew away, rubbing the injured spot with his right hand. The undeserved chastisement filled him with impotent fury.

"Haven't stolen nothing, you dirty old swiller! What d'you want to hoof me for with your great fat feet?"

The farmer dashed at him, but as he could not hope to catch the agile Hartl he picked up a stone and threw it at the fleeing boy; it caught him right on the back of his head. The lad staggered a few steps further, and then fell senseless to the ground.

The peasant, now thoroughly frightened, stared at the huddled body. He rushed up and bent over the boy, the latter did not move; he lay on his face with his arms akimbo. Blood oozed from the back of his head and stained his hair and the grass. The man stared vacantly at the victim of his impulse.

"Mary, Joseph, dear God in Heaven, forgive me, I didn't mean that; I never meant to hit the lad."

He shivered in every limb, and swung his left hand aimlessly, while he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his right sleeve. With trembling fingers he pulled a large blue handkerchief out of his trouser-pocket, bent over the unconscious boy, and pressed it on the wound. The lad groaned in pain.

"Thank God, he's still alive," sighed the farmer, lifted the boy in his arms, and ran across the fields.

He reached his farm, with the perspiration dropping from him, and looked round shamefacedly to see if anyone had observed him coming in.

His wife screamed. She thought that it was her nephew, Xandl, who was lying in her husband's arms.

The farmer laid the boy down carefully on the bed.

"Be quiet, Toni; run quick to G'stettner's; there's a doctor staying there for his holidays; bring him at once."

The blood was dripping under the handkerchief from Hartl's wound and ran in thin streams over the white-and-blue check pillows.

The weaver's wife now saw that the boy was a stranger and not her Xandl.

"Take the kid off the bed," she snapped. "Can't ye see he's spoiling all my pillows? It's only a month since I changed the beds!"

The man turned round in a flash and shouted at his wife.

"Be quiet, can't ye? D'ye want me sent to gaol? I did it. Go quick for the doctor, ye darned shrew, or I'll catch ye a good one. It's your eternal nagging and quarrelling that makes me so devilish wild!"

The doctor's examination was long and thorough. His face was grave.

"I can't say for certain yet; I must make a puncture and examine the spinal cord. It looks like a bad fracture. It's certainly concussion, bad concussion, in fact."

"Is that dangerous, Doctor? Could he die from it?"

The peasant's voice was anxious and hesitating.

"That's very hard to say; but send someone quick to the chemist, and don't forget—ice-bags, ice-bags on his head day and night."

The doctor stopped for a moment in the doorway.

"Is he your boy?"

"Oh, no! He's only on a visit."

"Then you'd much better let his parents know. You can never tell. You must inform the police, too, so that they can hunt for the blackguard."

"Yes, yes—it shall be done, Herr Doctor."

For five days Hartl lay without regaining consciousness. For five days and nights the weaver never went to bed

or barely closed an eye. He spent the whole time sitting in the chimney-corner by Hartl's bed, changing the ice-poultices and giving the boy his medicine punctually every hour. His eyes were perpetually turned from the invalid's white face to the Schwarzwald clock by the door. Rosary in hand, he kept on murmuring prayers and pleading with God to let the boy recover. Vow after vow he made in secret. He would give the church a window, light a long candle to St. Florian every week, and have masses said for poor souls. He swore that never again would he yield to an explosion of passion.

Little Xandl, the nephew, was not allowed in the room; he had to play outside in the yard. The farm hands, male and female, had to carry on their tasks without making the slightest noise. If a sound was heard in the yard or round the house, the owner rushed out and immediately restored silence.

"What did the police say? Is the rogue caught who knocked the kid about?"

"Not yet, but they'll get him before long."

The doctor's holidays were over. He had paid further visits to Hartl and impressed on Weber the importance of immediately calling in another doctor from Mödling or Vienna, as the boy's condition was still quite alarming.

The peasant promised anything and everything. His heart sank like a stone and fear clutched at him once more. If another doctor were called in, he would discover that he had not yet reported the affair to the police.

After the doctor left, he let day after day slip by. There was no change in Hartl's condition. His wife was consumed with anxiety, and snapped out:

"If he isn't better in the morning, I'm going to Mödling myself to get a doctor. D'ye want the police after ye?"

"Be quiet, can't ye? Can't ye talk quietly, woman. Don't ye see how it is with me, and that I just don't know what to do? I'm at my wit's end."

"Ye can say what ye like, but I'm off to Mödling to-morrow! I'm not going to let myself be gaoled, too, for ye."

The man rose from the chimney-corner and shook his fist at his wife.

"Get out! get out! and get out, now—quick! If anything happens and the police hear about it, I'm going

to tell them that the kid stole something and fell down from the loft. When the police hear that he's a thief, nothing can happen to me."

Hartl lay on the bed with white face and closed eyes. He was very wasted, and his eyes seemed to have sunk into his head. Only a few hours before he had emerged from the realms of twilight. His head ached. He tried to remember what had happened. At first he thought he was lying in his bed at home, but when he blinked from under his heavy eyelids and peered about him, he saw that he was surrounded by the walls of a strange room. In the chimney-corner sat a man with his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees; he was snoring slightly. Hartl's eyes closed wearily, and he went off to sleep again. A very agreeable feeling swept over him; he seemed to be floating on air.

He woke again after hours of refreshing sleep. A cold something on his head slipped down his cheek and brought him up sharp in the present. He peered out between his eyelashes and saw a hand replacing the ice-bags on his head. It was a man whose face Hartl could not see and who was muttering to himself:

"Go to gaol; shut up for a year an' more. What a fool! Poor devil!"

The invalid listened, following the man with his eyes as he fell back into the chimney-seat. The boy reflected:

"Now what have I been doing to get gaoled for?"

Memory came back slowly. Of course, he had not stolen anything. He had only looked at the pear tree. Then why had that man kicked him? Perhaps he would have taken one of those unripe pears off the tree afterwards. He had thought of doing so, but the man could not have known it. If all you did was to think of doing something, could you be sent to prison for it? Why did the man want to get him gaoled? What had he done wrong? Oh, if only he had stayed at home! Whatever would his mother say? And what about his father? Hartl judged from the man's remark that he meant to hand him over to the police.

His aunts and all the old women in the Seven Houses and the nurseries would see their prophecy come true—that the young scamp, Hartl Gürtler, would end his days in gaol.

The boy closed his eyes wearily, but was awakened again by a dispute between husband and wife. So it was true that he was to be sent to gaol! Oh, but they didn't know their Richard! Gürtler well! He wasn't caught as easily as that. They'd got to get him first!

The man approached the bed. In his hand was an earthenware bowl. The boy quickly closed his eyes. The uncouth old farmer raised the invalid's head and put the bowl to his lips.

"Let's try it; let's try it once more. P'raps he'll take it this time."

Hartl gulped down the milk with closed eyes. How good it tasted!

"Drink it up, laddy, drink it all up," murmured the man. "We'll soon get you right!"

"Yes," thought Hartl, "right into Göllersdorf, Stein, or the Grau Hans.* Catch him giving them the chance."

That night the moonbeams woke Hartl. Roses bloomed in the front garden and wafted their heavy perfume into the room. At the lower end of his couch was the bed in which lay man and wife, engaged in a snoring match. Hartl chuckled to himself. He could distinguish them by the respective keys, and drew comparisons. She, thought Hartl, snores like a fret-saw and he like the circular-saw of the construction company near the Seven Houses.

He slowly sat up in bed. He had a horrible headache. He now noticed that he had a thick bandage round his head. He thought very hard for a moment. Of course! the farmer and his wife had been talking about gaol, but they'd have to be a good sight smarter. Hartl wasn't such a fool as all that. If only he knew why his head, which ached so violently, was all bandaged up? Had he got mixed up in a scrap? How had he got here, anyhow? He carefully reviewed the scene which had taken place between himself and the farmer in the field. He had jumped up and run away, hurling abuse at the old man; but what came afterwards? Alas, he could not remember a thing! He must obviously have done something wrong or they wouldn't be talking about sending him to gaol. He climbed cautiously out of bed, staggered, and had to cling to a chair. His headache became worse.

* Prisons in Vienna and Lower Austria.

"Confound my head; it hurts horribly," he muttered.

On the windowsill stood the milk. Hartl was thirsty. Making no sound he got into his short leather breeches which were lying near the bed. He tottered to the window like a drunken man. He was not used to walking. He swallowed all the milk in long gulps.

"I'm hungry," the boy reflected. "I wish I knew where my chicken is."

He had not the remotest notion that he had been laid up at the farm in a high fever for more than three weeks, but was under the impression that the incident in the field had taken place on the previous afternoon.

"You don't catch me being locked up," Hartl said to himself. "They'd have to be a good sight smarter," he repeated.

He felt in his trouser-pockets to ascertain if any of his treasures were missing. They comprised the thirty-five kreuzer, his pocket-knife, a small comb which had only a few teeth left, and his handkerchief. Weber had left everything in the boy's pockets for fear that he might be accused of robbery.

Hartl's head was tired and buzzing as he sat down on the chimney-seat. What should he do? Now he noticed that his boots were peeping from under the Webers's bed, and he also discovered his parcel on a chair beside it.

The bed suddenly creaked. Hartl started in terror. Suppose these people woke up! He crept up the chimney and flattened himself against the wall. He heard the farmer sit up in bed.

"Get ye up, wife; it's time the lad had his medicine again."

"Get up yerself; it's not my job!"

The terrified Hartl made himself as small as possible. A grey dawn was breaking through the window. Innumerable cocks began to crow.

"Mary, Joseph, the lad's gone!"

The farmer's wife was out of bed in a flash.

"Are ye daft? Perhaps he's lyin' at the foot?"

But the missing boy was not to be found at the foot of the bed. Weber snatched a match from the table by the door and, forgetting that he had no trousers on, struck it on his naked shins.

"D——n! I've set my blooming leg on fire."

Notwithstanding his terror, Hartl in his hiding-place almost burst out laughing when he saw the farmer in a short shirt hopping about on his long legs.

"Oh, my ! Oh, my ! Wherever has the lad got to ?"

The farmer and his wife bolted out of the room to search for the truant.

Hartl climbed down quickly from the chimney, collected his boots and parcel and vanished through the window. He staggered uncertainly across the front garden, but could get no further than the gooseberry bushes. There his legs gave out. He crept under the bushes and lay still. He could hear the Webers calling and he huddled himself up to be as small as possible. He was very cold and trembled in every limb. The grass and leaves were wet with dew. He cried himself to sleep.

Meanwhile the Webers hunted high and low for him. They were anxious to cause no excitement and replied rudely to the questions of the farm hands.

Hartl woke with a yell. A chicken had run over his naked legs and the bushes scratched his face. He immediately remembered where he was, and peeped through the branches. The sun was blazing down outside. Nothing stirred.

How late was it ? The boy began to feel hungry and his hand went out for the parcel which was lying beside him ; but he sought in vain for the remains of the spring-chicken. He was furious.

"Those Webers are just a couple of thieves ! They've got a farmyard full of full-grown fowls, and yet they rob a kid of his spring-chicken."

His mood did not last long and then Hartl discovered that he was lying under gooseberry bushes. Slowly he began to pluck the over-ripe forgotten berries. When he had eaten his fill, he took stock of the situation. He must obviously not show himself now—in broad daylight. Memory wandered back and the adventure in the Liesing Bräuhausgarten came to mind. Now he realized why the farmer had talked about gaol—because he had had food and drink there without paying for it. He began to feel very uncomfortable round the spine. Could you really get sent to gaol for a year for a spring-chicken and some apple-fool ? Why, he hadn't even eaten the whole chicken ! They'd have to knock something off his sentence for that.

He decided that he would stay in the bushes until darkness came on. He cautiously pulled on his stockings and boots. If only the beastly headache would stop! He was afraid to take off the bandage. All at once he was disturbed in his lair by the sound of voices and steps. He could hear something crunching the gravel close at hand.

"How long are you staying here, Frau Direktor?"

"Not much longer, thank Heaven! There's absolutely nothing to do in this hole. If you want anything you've got to send in to Mödling or Vienna for it. Do you know, I had to get this plum cake from Mödling myself, yesterday."

Plum cake! Sweet music in the ears of the Viennese! Hartl's mouth watered and his lips silently repeated a long-drawn "Plu-u-u-m Ca-a-a-ke."

The ladies sat down in the neighbouring garden, quite close to Hartl's hiding-place. Suddenly the boy was smitten with terror. Close by his ear a sniffing noise could be heard, immediately followed by loud barking. A corpulent pug sniffed at the bandage and barked louder than ever. Sweat poured from Hartl's brow and he was on the point of getting his two hands round the dog's fat neck and choking it into silence when the pug's owner saved him from discovery.

"Pufferl! Pufferl! Come here, boy. The dog simply goes mad out here. It must be another mole or a salamander or lizard to make him start barking like that. Pufferl! Good dog! You're a good boy."

Hartl held his breath. Pufferl on his mistress's lap was showing signs of an intention to explore the gooseberry bushes again. He growled and emitted short sharp barks.

"Be quiet, you rascal. Come, Frau Direktor, let's go to meet the postman; he may have something for us. Nettl can clear up afterwards."

The ladies' voices died away in the distance.

Hartl put his head out gingerly to ascertain the whereabouts of the tea-table and the plum cake.

A summer-house, wreathed in wild vine and ivy, stood against the bushes which separated the two farms. The boy crept out warily. There was no one to be seen. He stood up and flicked the soil from his sleeves; his eyes swept the table and almost came out of his head. On a tea-table, gay with flowers, stood a plate with half of a large plum-cake, a coffee-pot, two cups, a sugar basin and a

milk jug. Hartl licked his parched and burning lips. Whipped cream! Whipped cream! A whole saucer of it!

The starving boy fell upon the dainties. He put six lumps of sugar in the coffee, bit enormous chunks out of the plum-cake and cleared the saucer of whipped cream at one go with the spoon. Four cups of coffee followed. Little was left of the plum-cake.

The sound of voices compelled him to gulp down a large slice unmasticated. He put the cup down like a flash, stood still and listened. The Weber woman's voice was strident behind the gooseberry bushes; she was welcoming her husband.

"This is a nice time to come home! Five o'clock in the afternoon. I suppose you've been hanging round the inn? Ye brawling drunkard!"

"Hold your silly tongue! I've been searching all over the place. Can't find him anywhere. I'm absolutely worn out."

"Fancy all this bother over a young thief like that. He can go hang for all I care."

The voices died away. Hartl began to be very worried. He looked down at the table. His conscience smote him. He had laid hands on—stolen someone else's property. To whom did all the afternoon tea stuff belong? If he was caught now, it would be all up with him. He had trespassed on someone else's garden—taken something which did not belong to him. This was quite different to his nightly excursions into the Brigittenau nurseries.

Hartl's hand slipped into his trousers pocket. His face cleared up and his eyes sparkled significantly. He drew a silver ten-kreuzer piece from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"Surely a *flins* ought to be enough for that bad coffee, and the piece of cake?"

He produced a stump of pencil from his bottomless pockets, and wrote in large letters on the tablecloth:

"The ten-kreuzer are for the coffee and the cake."

He considered his writing with his head on one side, and then his eye fell again on the coin and he meditated.

"Ten-kreuzer? I ought to be allowed a few more lumps of sugar."

Thereupon he helped himself to a handful of sugar, stuffed it in his pocket and crept back to his hiding-place.

He decided to stay there until it was dark and continue his wanderings during the night. He went to sleep sucking a piece of sugar.

The heat of the day had filled the air with electricity. When evening closed down on the hills every sound in the woods was stilled. In all those haunts where birds twittered or a woodpecker tapped away, hour upon hour, or a squirrel held a nut in his forepaws, and cracked it noisily with its sharp teeth, a deathly silence now reigned. Lightning flashed all over the hills in the south and east, and a sultry heat oppressed the earth.

Dark clouds came scudding over the Rax and the Schneeberg. A storm was brewing in the sky. Not a leaf stirred, and the frogs and toads had concluded their concert. A large natterjack sat on a broad dockleaf and lowered his feeler as a signal that it was time to take shelter under water from the storm. Such human beings as were abroad tried to reach the protection of a roof. A distant rolling and sudden flashes of fork lightning announced the approach of the storm.

Though not a sound could be heard hitherto, a mysterious rustling could now be heard in the air, a wall of yellow dust came house-high down the street, open windows banged backwards and forwards and the panes fell out with a crash.

A strong gust swept howling past; then there was a silence for a moment, a flash of lightning made the swift-descending darkness bright as day, a crashing thunderclap smote the air and Heaven opened its sluices.

Flash followed flash and one thunderclap trod on the heels of another. Two, three, four thunderclouds collided and the earth's last day seemed to have come.

The cannonade had roused Hartl from sleep. A little stream was flowing under him. He was soon out from under the bushes. He was in the Webers's garden, and the lightning threw him into strong relief. At times he seemed to have a lake of fire all around him. At times the rain was punctuated by great hailstones.

When a further succession of flashes bathed the garden in brilliant light, the terrified Hartl pressed his face into the bushes. Not that he was frightened of the storm, Quite the contrary. His only fear was of being recognized. Yet he had no need to worry on that score because there

was not a soul in the streets and neither man nor beast in the garden.

The cattle in the stalls tugged at their chains and bellowed nervously.

Within doors, men, women and children were dipping their fingers in the holy-water stoup, crossing themselves and offering up fervent prayers to St. Florian, the saint who guards the faithful against fires.

Hartl fled to the summer-house in the adjoining garden. He was wet through, the bandage round his head was dripping and little streams ran down his forehead and cheeks.

In the lightning flashes the hills wore a ghostly look, and the roar of the thunder increased. Then four brilliant flashes seared the sky with elemental force, accompanied by thunderous crashes.

In the silence that followed could be heard the distant tinkle of the storm-bell of a village church. The lightning had started a fire and the sky turned blood-red. A whole village seemed to be in flames.

The place was soon seething with activity. The night-watchman sounded the fire alarm. Men and women, some only half-dressed, rushed out of the houses. The fire-engine was pulled out of the station, likewise the rack-wagon grooms came running up with horses and harnessed them to the shafts. The trumpeter of the local fire-brigade spurred the slow-moving firemen on. The lingering note of his horn echoed through the stormy night and then began the mad career to the village. The men on the vehicles buttoned up their coats and bravely cocked their helmets sideways.

Under the hoses, axes and rope-ladders in the rack-wagon, Hartl lay concealed. He had taken advantage of all the commotion to ascertain whether the Webers had gone out, too. When he had satisfied himself that this was not the case, he had seized a favourable moment to creep into the wagon.

The vehicle rattled over the rough country road at breakneck speed. Hartl's head ached abominably. He was already regretting that he had ever come along, and frightened of being discovered. He had carefully calculated that this would give him the best chance of getting out of reach of the Webers.

The rain diminished and soon stopped altogether, though the distant muttering of thunder could still be heard.

The fire was reached after three-quarters of an hour's furious driving. Too late. The wretched cottage was already completely gutted. A number of firemen were already on the spot. The Mödling Fire Brigade with its steam fire-engine had got there first.

Hartl had crawled out from among the ladders when the firemen jumped down. He vanished into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE funerals of Martin Bierwolf and his murderer, Ferdl Stiegler, took place on the same day. Both the bodies were released simultaneously by the authorities.

In the mortuary of the General Infirmary—that place of tears and pain—practically all the tenants of the Seven Houses were assembled. The majority of the visitors had come for the funeral of Martin Bierwolf. Only his nearest relations, his "girl", Loisi Kreitmeier, and a few friends were present to pay their last respects to the murderer.

Bierwolf's widow was absent. On the morning after the murder she showed signs of insanity, which degenerated into homicidal mania. The adulteress was to pay heavily for her faithlessness.

The women of the Seven Houses were quite callous about the whole affair. They were all prematurely old. The hard struggle for existence left them neither time nor inclination for erotic adventures. They gave themselves, while still young and inexperienced, to the first man they liked, and few were the brides to wear the myrtle wreath when they stepped to the altar. As a rule several of their children were present at the wedding, and often enough each child had a different father. It was life as they knew it. Their mothers and grandmothers had done the same, and their daughters and grand-daughters gave themselves with the same indifference.

Confessions of love were never accompanied by presents of flowers or genuflexions. If Schani liked Fanny, he crept up to her room and inquired briefly: "Shall we play

grown-ups?" If she said "yes" everything was settled, and often enough the couple could be seen walking arm in arm to the Danube or up to Yägerau the very same evening. Neither mothers nor daughters knew how to avert the consequences. The result was that the number of illegitimate children became positively appalling.

If a girl refused a boy, her reward was blows or abuse—according to the temperament of the rejected suitor.

The herding together of parents and children —frequently actually sleeping together—in tenements which often consisted merely of one room and a kitchen, familiarized youth with the intimate relations of its elders.

But if it happened that a girl would not take up with a boy, the women contemptuously turned up their noses at her and called her a hypocrite who was "carrying-on" in secret.

The first love-token which the young man demanded of the maiden was her immediate surrender. No one was going to buy a pig in a poke.

The hospital authorities made a mistake in insisting that both funerals should take place at the same time.

Martin Bierwolf was buried at a quarter to three, and Ferdl Stiegler a quarter of an hour later.

The dead murderer's aged mother stood with dry eyes and with bowed back at the opaque windows of the mortuary. Her trembling fingers clutched a handkerchief and a rosary. At her side and clinging to her old black skirt was her grand-daughter, the three-year-old Mitzi, whose great blue eyes were fixed on her grandmother's pallid face. On the other side, Loisi Kreitmeier had given the old woman her arm.

Loisi was a lovely girl with a full figure. Her bosom was high in her black blouse, and her hips were broad. She glared defiantly at the mourners gathered round the family and relations of Martin Bierwolf.

They began to make nasty remarks about her. The women, worn out by work and worry, whispered vulgar and abusive comments on the dead murderer's beloved.

"The hussy must find it necessary to go about with her figure stickin' out like that," muttered old Patuschka; "she ought to hide her head with shame for going about with that old lecher so long."

"You're quite right," Frau Schmalzbauer, *alias* Wunderer, cut in; "that Ferdl Stiegler was a bad man, and a lecher."

Loisi clasped the old woman's arm and clenched her teeth in anguish.

"Be a dear, mother, and tell those cats that I'm heart-broken about Ferdl. If anyone says a word against him, I'll scratch his eyes out."

Loisi was the only person who had had the slightest influence over the wild Ferdl. Her love for him had been deep and genuine. She had gone with Stiegler six years, but it was only after several weeks—and not on the very first day—that she had given herself during an excursion to the Hermannskogel.

This pretty girl worked in the imperial cigar factory in the Porzellangasse. The officials and her fellow-workers pestered her, and well-dressed men spoke to her in the streets, but she remained unapproachable. Unapproachable until she met the turbulent Stiegler and fell hopelessly in love with him. She was determined to make Ferdl, who had just served a sentence of three years' penal servitude in Stein gaol, into a decent man again.

Stiegler's mother had had only two children, Ferdl and Felicitas. When only sixteen, Feli had been seduced and deserted by a restaurant-keeper who owned a café in the Wallensteinstrasse. After the birth of a child, Mitzi, she died of puerperal fever. Ferdl, who was passionately fond of his sister and extremely hot-tempered even as a schoolboy, found the seducer, and after a short, sharp quarrel ran a knife into him.

Ferdl's three years in gaol had taken all the moral backbone out of him. He seldom did any work, and spent his time in Ratz's spirits-bar, or Adam's beer-house in the First House. When he "played grown-ups" with Loisi Kreitmeier, he promised to reform. He went back to the building contractor's where he had proved himself a very useful man at sawing. But it did not last long. He was always quarrelling with the men, who brought up his past at every opportunity, and so he lost one job after another. Several girls and women were to a large extent responsible for his downfall, through bribing the handsome curly-haired fellow to do their will. Loisi left him several times. On such occasions he soon looked for work, and picking up little Mitzi, whom he loved

even more than his dead sister, went to find her. When he ran her to earth, he held the child up and said:

"Now, Mitzerl, you've got to ask Loisi to be kind to Uncle Ferdinand. Tell her never to be cross again."

The child clasped her little hands, then flung her arms round Loisi who began to cry in spite of herself.

Mitzi often acted the peacemaker, but Ferdl always relapsed into his old bad ways. Brandy had a good deal to do with it.

Frau Bierwolf spent much of her time alone. Martin, her husband, was often away working in the provinces. The woman was young and temperamental, had a good time and did no work as Martin earned good money. It was not difficult to seduce Ferdl Stiegler. One summer holiday she went to Adametz Gardens with him where she kept him well plied with drink, and they went on the merry-go-round and the swings. Loisi had him brought home. He was hopelessly drunk and nothing could be done with him.

The Bierwolf woman next dragged him to the bank of the Danube Canal, and swept him into her arms.

From that day Ferdl was a lost soul. Employing all the erotic arts she had learned in her adventures with fine gentlemen from the aristocratic quarter, she bewitched, ruined, and held him.

When Ferdl demanded the same sort of entertainment from Loisi, she broke with him for ever. But she remained friends with his old mother and little Mitzi. When Frau Stiegler went washing to the Gürtlers she brought her grand-daughter to Loisi's parents who took charge of her all day.

Loisi had come with her dead lover's mother to-day. She had made her home with the old woman after Ferdl's death. It was only when her beloved was dead that she realized how dearly she loved him. Perhaps she ought not to have left Ferdl so much to himself.

"Granny, Granny, is Uncle Ferdinand quite dead? Can I have a look at him? Won't he ever play with me again?"

Tears filled the old woman's eyes, her first tears since she had heard the news of her son's death in the night of terror. She passed her hand over her grand-daughter's fair hair.

"No, no, poor little mite; Uncle Ferdinand can't ever play with you again. He's had his last play, Mitzerl."

The bearers now emerged from the mortuary with Martin Bierwolf's coffin and carried it into the chapel. The mourners followed. The chapel bell tolled shrilly. The priest blessed the dead, then the bearers raised the coffin, brought it out and put it in the hearse. The mourners entered stage-coaches which clattered over the cobbles of the courtyard and turned into the Spitalgasse.

In the mortuary, Loisi cast a lingering look at the dead man's white face, against which his small black moustache stood out sharply. Even in death Ferdl was still a handsome man. Loisi felt a choking sensation, her knees trembled, she burst out sobbing, bent over the coffin and kissed the cold forehead.

"God bless you, my Ferdl, forgive me for being hard to you so often. I'll pray for you that your soul may go to Heaven, and we'll meet again there."

Her tears flowed over the dead man's waxen cheeks. Frau Stiegler wanted to lift Mitzi up to have a last look at her dead uncle, but she did not feel strong enough. Loisi lifted her up instead. She sobbed violently and her eyes were filled with tears as she said:

"See, Mitzerl, stroke uncle's cheek."

Shyly, softly, and in instinctive terror of the mystery of death, the little hand passed over the white face, but was immediately withdrawn.

"Uncle's so cold, Auntie Loisi; is he feeling cold? The sun seems so hot outside."

The old mother had to be removed from the coffin by force.

"My boy, my only son, my Ferdl, I'll soon be with you. You'd have been a good man if it hadn't have been for your sister's trouble. Ferdl, my son, greet Feli for me when you come to our good Father in Heaven."

When the hearse bearing the dead Ferdl Stiegler passed through the main gate of the Central Cemetery the mourners and relations of Martin Bierwolf were already coming out.

Frau Stiegler collapsed altogether at her son's grave.

After being paid on the following Saturday Loisi Kreitmeier left the cigar factory in the Porzellangasse for ever. She had thought it all out. To her parents she invented

the plausible story that she refused any longer to furnish a topic of conversation for the scandalmongers of the Seven Houses, and was therefore taking a post as housekeeper to an elderly gentleman in St. Pölten.

Loisi's aim was to secure to her dead lover's mother a care-free old age, and give little Mitzi a good education. She could not hope to achieve it with the six gulden a week she earned in the cigar factory. She stayed over the Sunday with Frau Stiegler and made her promise not to go out washing any more. She herself would bring the money required for her and Mitzerl's keep every Saturday.

Broken in body, in soul, the old woman merely nodded, and scarcely heard what the girl said. Her thoughts were with her children in Heaven, and her lips just stirred in prayer.

The following morning Loisi appeared at the "Am Peter" police-station, reported that she had joined the establishment in the Goldschmidtgasse and applied for a permit.

It was not any love of excitement and still less sensuality or dislike of work which impelled Loisi to become a prostitute. It seemed clear to her that only in this way would it be possible for two persons to whom she was utterly devoted to lead happy lives free from carking care.

How much finer was this simple child of the people than all those who poured the vials of their scorn upon her in simulated indignation!

CHAPTER FIVE

GRIEF and despair reigned unchallenged in the home of the Gürtler family.

The mother lay ill, the father utterly broken, Emilie and Rosa cried the whole day long and Adolf never stopped asking whether Hartl had not been found, and if his brother were ever coming back.

Two days after Hartl's disappearance, Gürtler went with a police official to Vöslau to inquire from the Thima Troupe whether the boy had turned up there. On the previous day the Vöslau police, on telegraphed instructions from the Vienna police, had interrogated the Director and all the

members of the company. The local police were required to keep secret observation on them to see if they were joined by a stray boy.

The distracted father remained three days in Vöslau, hoping upon hope that Hartl would turn up at last. He had telegraphed his address to Vienna so that he could be informed if the boy returned home. On the fourth day he went back to Vienna in a state of extreme depression. Rosa was waiting for him with tear-stained face on the station. When her father saw the tears in her eyes he knew that Hartl had not come home.

Four days later Gürtler went to Fischamend on the Danube.

It was at Fischamend that on the ninth day the Danube gave up the bodies of persons drowned in Vienna. Here they were thrown up on land. Curiously enough, no one could offer any explanation as to why the corpses, great and small, should be slowly carried down under water for eight days and invariably come to the surface exactly on the ninth, to be cast on the bank in the bend of the foaming river at this point.

Close to Fischamend lies the cemetery of the nameless. Many, very many, unfortunates who have lost their lives by accident or when bathing, and far more who have voluntarily cast off the burden of existence, lie buried there awaiting the day of resurrection.

Gürtler assumed that Hartl had been drowned. As no news came from Fischamend, he went there himself. The officials could only tell him that the Danube had not cast ashore a small boy's body during the last few days.

The fishermen comforted him as best they could, telling him of cases where parents had thought their children drowned and a few days later the young scamp had turned up again safe and sound.

It was poor consolation, but the father later clung hard to it.

Day after day and week after week went by but Hartl did not return. He had disappeared without trace. The little girls often went to the police-station in the Raphael-gasse, but they never came back with the good news that the boy had been found or any trace of him discovered.

No one knew what had become of him.

CHAPTER SIX

AFTER a search lasting several days, Hartl found the Thima Troupe in Neunkirchen. He had begged for bread and milk from cottages, stolen fruit and given a wide berth to gendarmes in the country and policemen in the towns.

August Thima's visit to Vöslau had been spoiled by the incessant worrying of the police and principally by the poor business he was doing. He therefore struck camp and removed to Gainfarn, but even there his luck was out. In Wiener-Neustadt the Wünschhüttel Company had taken up station and so Thima was compelled to go further south unless he wanted to return to Vienna.

The town of Neunkirchen was selected as most worthy to entertain the illustrious visitors and enjoy the honour of witnessing the superb displays of the world-famous company of artistes directed by August Thima.

Hartl reached Neunkirchen one morning. He was tired to death, his soles were through and his toes peeped inquisitively out of the end of his boots. His feet were sore with walking, though whenever any opportunity presented itself during his wanderings of taking a lift, he had promptly availed himself of it. Often enough he was driven from his perch—not always a comfortable one—by the whip of some ill-disposed driver who had no use for an invisible passenger.

The tenacious boy had made cautious inquiries in every town and village. At night he crept into barns or hayricks. He often thought of returning home, but the fear of punishment and more particularly his mother's threat that he would be sent to Korneuberg Reformatory made him abandon the idea.

Had Frau Gürtler known with what terror and dismay all her talk about Korneuberg Reformatory had filled her child's heart, she would never have used such a threat.

Hartl had scarcely set eyes on the arena in Wiener-Neudstadt than he made a joyful bolt for it. His disappointment was great when he read the name of Karl Wünschhüttel, instead of Thima's on the hoarding. Yet he thought of offering his services to the company, until he reflected that not one member of the troupe was known to him. From one of the bandsmen, to whom he told a lie

or two, he ascertained that the Thima crowd had passed through the town and were now in Neunkirchen.

Herr Direktor Thima was more enraged than astonished when he found Hartl asleep at the door of his caravan. He did not recognize the boy at first. The dirty bandage which still wreathed Hartl's head, and under which the little visitors were very much at home, his emaciation and none too clean face had considerably altered the appearance of the small adventurer.

"Hello, boy, what the devil are you doing here ? You're in a bit of a mess, aren't you ?"

Hartl began his tale of lies. He had no suspicion that his father and the police had already been searching for him. He invented the romance that his parents had sent him to be made into an acrobat. The Herr Direktor should realize that he, Hartl, knew everything already, and anyhow there would be no difficulty about training him on.

Thima smirked as the youngster told his story. What an accomplished little liar ! He might become very useful.

"It's no use, my dear chap. You're a first-class humbug, but I've already had quite enough trouble over you. The gendarmes and your father came to see us in Vöslau when they were looking for you. They came round every day and rummaged about the whole time. In the end we had to leave the place, thanks to you. You get back to your mother's petticoats, and jolly quick, too !"

"I'm never going back home, Herr Thima. I tell you that flat, and if I can't stay with you I'm going off to Pauntzen or Wünschhüttel ; they'll take me quick enough."

"D'you think Wünschhüttel or Pauntzen can do more'n me, you young scamp ? If it wasn't for the bandage round your fat head I'd catch you such a wallop you'd think a horse had kicked you."

Hartl stood gloomily before the Direktor. August Thima felt himself slighted in his honour as a Direktor. Hartl had touched him on his weakest spot.

"You've got to learn a bit before you start opening your mouth."

Hartl was allowed to stay. The company remained but two days more in Lower Austria and then crossed the frontier into Hungary.

Richardl Gürtler was now in for hard times.

The daily menu at the meals of the Thima family had one standing dish—the stick. Morning, noon and night, and even between meals little tit-bits were handed out.

The first trick which Hartl was taught was the collection of kreuzer from the spectators who took a free look over the top of the fence. The boy was clad in thin woollen tights of the same kind as those worn by the acrobats. This garment had no pockets and all the pleats in the "trousers", as the little pants—which only covered his thighs—were called, were sewed tightly to the material so that the collector would not be tempted to stow away a kreuzer or even a sechserl.

The Frau Direktor sat at the pay-box. When the collector returned from his rounds—every member of the company had to take his turn—he had to submit to a thorough search by Frau Thima if he was an apprentice. He had to open his mouth wide and force back his tongue to show that he was not hiding any coins inside. His mistress's hand went to the "trousers", pulled it down and then an exhaustive examination was made of every part of his body where there was the slightest possibility that a coin might be temporarily concealed. The examiner wound up by taking off his shoes.

The Frau Direktor generally forgot that the young artiste was probably hiding something in his hand. Often enough the boys passed a few kreuzer from hand to hand when their mistress's eyes and fingers were engaged elsewhere.

These children were compelled to do the heaviest work and all but starve for their pains. This lamentable state of affairs was frequently alleviated by the fact that in the matter of eatables the distinction between mine and thine was not too finely drawn.

There was another boy in the company who was eighteen months older than Hartl—Richard Gürtler was not yet nine. Hartl's colleague and fellow-sufferer, Georg Brösicke ("Schorsch", for short) was an illegitimate child who had been brought for training to the Herr Direktor by a heartless mother. Kind treatment, good food and touch with home were not stipulated for in return for a payment of three gulden per month by the anxious and affectionate mother.

To Schorsch's satisfaction be it said that the Herr Direktor had only received the first month's payment although a year had passed since the youngster joined the company.

Among the many duties of the two boys were those of sticking up posters and distributing programmes, which were collected again afterwards.

Hartl had to learn the "invitation-speech" by heart—a thing he achieved as early as the eighth smack—and while his comrade was engaged in his oration, Schorsch laid the programme, which set forth in large lettering the unparalleled performances and entirely novel acrobatic feats, on the table of the house or the counter of the shop they happened to be visiting.

Whatever the weather, hot or cold, fair or foul, little Hartl had to wear his tights when he was distributing programmes. Schorsch, on the other hand, covered his tights with a coat which would fit him properly in twenty or thirty years' time, assuming that he was then inclined to *embonpoint*. The sleeves of this vestment, which had been made for a giant, were long, and though they had been shortened by three inches they hung down to the boy's knees. These sleeves had the great advantage that things could be hidden up them. In provision shops Schorsch knew how to place Hartl in such a position for his oration that the audience was compelled to stand with its back to the counter, or at any rate to the spot selected by Schorsch as his station.

Hartl proceeded to hold forth :

"Ladies and gentlemen ! In the name of the management I beg to inform you that to-day and for the next few days the great and world-famous company of Herr Direktor August Thima will give performances at half-past seven in Gau fields.

"On this programme which I shall come back for on the last day, you will see the names of all the artistes who are to appear before the public. At the conclusion of the performance the Herr Direktor will do the Flying Leap from a pole a hundred feet high. But the Flying Leap, in which many acrobats and directors have broken their necks, will be preceded by a pantomime enlivened with much good fooling. The piece is called : 'Grasel, the Two Robber Leaders', or 'The Devil's Mill' on the Wiener Berg, with

Bengal lights. The Frau Direktor is the robber bride of both leaders.

"The management strongly recommend it to you because the front rows are only ten-kreuzer and the back only five. Children five anywhere. The same with soldiers. Persons standing on the planks outside need not pay anything when the collector comes round.

"I shall collect the programme later and will be much obliged if you will exhibit it here meanwhile."

During this speech, which Hartl delivered without a single pause, so great was his terror that his friend might be caught, Schorsch managed to secrete something in the way of eatables up one of his long sleeves. The choicest wares were long sticks of dried sausage, which could be pushed up to the armpits. Other things, such as cheeses, fruit, rolls and cucumbers also disappeared from the counter when opportunity occurred. For sweets, however, the hungry youngsters, had no particular inclination. Quantity always prevailed over quality.

Schorsch was several times caught at his conjuring-tricks and then he usually came in for an unmerciful thrashing ; often enough he had only Hartl's tearful pleading to thank for the fact that the police were not fetched.

Sometimes the boys begged for bread and occasionally had some actually given them.

It was hunger, ever raging in these children's small insides, that drove them to beg and steal.

Yet they had great times after the performances were over, when the poor creatures were kindly allowed to retire with their hunk of dry black-bread to the supply-wagon in which they slept on an old net once used for acrobatic shows but now discarded. The begged and stolen eatables were then duly produced and a great tuck-in followed.

They roasted potatoes in the brazier outside the wagon and found that they went splendidly with the dry sausage.

In the smaller towns the performances of the Thima Company brought the majority of the inhabitants to the show. The inside of the arena was full up only on Sundays and weekdays. The majority of the spectators stood outside round the three-foot barrier and most of them sneaked off when the collecting-plate began to tinkle in their vicinity.

The orchestra consisted of four men and sat on a raised

daïs near the stage. The latter was a detached platform, flanked on either side by two stands on each of which were four paraffin lamps. The stage was enclosed in a gaudily-painted framing behind which the "dressing-rooms" were erected.

The performance began with the orchestra. A clarionet wailed so piteously as to arouse sympathy, the horn was tuned too high and never agreed with the clarionet, the trombone growled angrily at their dispute and the big drum tried by vigorous thumping to drown the discordant din of the other three. All the same, the unholy shindy attracted visitors.

After the "band" had sounded a triple summons to all quarters of the Heavens, Schorsch and Hartl appeared as the first item on the programme. They stood on their heads, turned cartwheels, played leapfrog, did the double "Viech", and ran about on their hands—to give the audience a foretaste of what was to come.

The boys were followed by a troupe of dancing-girls who treated the greatly-honoured public to a hornpipe, then a Highland fling and finally a czardas, each accompanied by a quick change of costume.

The orchestra often went wrong and played the czardas to the schottisch, whereupon Kati whisked round and shrieked: "You silly fools, are you off your heads or just drunk again? Can't you see I've got the Highland plaid on?" At this the clarionet and horn blared furiously at each other.

Acrobats, athletes and dancers followed until the turn of the great drama arrived. This was positively staggering.

The key to the whole, and likewise the grand finale, was the celebrated Flying Leap.

With a flourish of trumpets the Herr Direktor appeared in tights and made a speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen! May I have your ears for a few moments. I am about to perform before you the most difficult and dangerous feat the world has ever known.

"The Flying Leap! Twenty of us started the Flying Leap and nineteen have had accidents, most of them breaking their necks. I am absolutely the only survivor. I must therefore ask you all not to make the slightest sound lest I, too, break my neck. Lest God desert me, I will first say a few Paternosters and the Creed; then the Frau Direktor

will go round and I ask you to give her a little tip or gratuity so that she shall have something if I come to grief. Orchestra, please !"

The orchestra blundered into Chopin's Funeral March and the Herr Direktor knelt down, folded his hands and put his head on one side. His eyes sought the starry sky and his lips murmured: "May these silly, crop-headed yokels not sneak off when the old girl goes round with the plate."

The Frau Direktor, resplendent in her close-fitting tights, went round with the plate, made eyes at everyone, and smacked the hands of the more audacious individuals who tried to tickle her.

After a time the Direktor rose from his knees, jumped down from the platform, ran to the pay-box and began to climb up the rungs of the hundred-foot (though only fifty above ground !) pole. At the top was a common kitchen chair, secured by nails and ropes.

When the undaunted hero arrived at the top, he bawled out: "Silence, orchestra !"

From a contraption in the centre of the arena hung a couple of ropes with looped ends which were slung to the pole on which the Direktor sat. These loops were now fastened round his wrists and drawn tight.

"Have you finished collecting ?" the Director called out from on high.

"No, not quite !"

"All right, I'll say another Paternoster and Ave Maria."

Not a sound could be heard in the audience.

"Pray for me, woman !" cried August Thima.

"Silence ! The Bengal lights !"

The performer slowly slid forward, jumped from the chair, hurtled through the air across the arena, swung himself up again and got his legs over a trapeze which hung thirty feet above the stage.

A roar of applause greeted the master ; the orchestra struck up the Radetsky March and the lamps on the stage were extinguished by Hartl and Schorsch.

Hartl had grown accustomed to his vagabond life. Whereas at the outset it was fear that kept him from returning home, memories of his parents' house were now slowly fading. He did not learn much, had forgotten his ambition

to become a Direktor himself and, notwithstanding hunger and the stick, led a carefree existence interwoven with a succession of childish dreams. In his youthful innocence the lad had not the slightest notion what unspeakable misery he had brought upon his family.

Deep mourning and sorrow unutterable reigned in one home almost on the outskirts of Vienna where the Danube Canal leaves the mother stream and the last spurs of the Alps are arrested on the banks of the rushing Danube ; where for weeks a sky of eternal blue had gazed into the windows of the Seven Houses and the wind carried the fragrance of trees, flowers and grasses down from the hills into Brigittenau.

The hearts of a loving mother and father, on whom God had imposed the most terrible trials, were broken by the disaster that had overtaken them. For Gürtler and his wife there was no sun. All was night.

The sunshine of the house was gone. The cheerful rascal, who had so often angered his parents with his tomfoolery, but cheered them up time and again with his merry pranks, had left them and taken all the light with him. His favourite rabbit died a few days after his disappearance and it seemed as if Hansi, the canary, did not sing so often in his cage.

The mother's heart was broken. Many a time she lay awake all night. Her thoughts were with her child.

Hartl's name was never mentioned in the house lest the old wound should be reopened. No one ever talked about him yet every member of his family was always thinking about him and praying for the boy's return.

On the wall above the sofa hung a little photograph, a snapshot on tin. It showed Hartl standing with his legs—in short leather breeches—apart, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his eyes bright and a mischievous smile wreathing his lips.

His mother often sat looking up at the photograph and she would press both hands to her heart and give way to choking tears.

And when the silver sickle of the moon stood over the Türkenschanzpark and the breeze gently wafted the strains of the military band from the Goldener Adler in Döbling, Father Gürtler buried his teeth in his pillow to save himself

from crying out loud. Mother Gürtler would then feel for her husband's hand, stroke his stricken face and speak words of comfort to him:

"Be still, Maxl, don't give way. I feel our dear lad, our Hartl, will come back some day."

Yet year after year went by. A wreath was hung round Hartl's photograph. Still no news came of the boy. His mother's hair and his father's hair and beard turned snowy white.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE clock of St. Stephen's Cathedral jumped from 11.55 to twelve midnight. A few patrons still lingered outside the Café Europe. Night birds passed, harassed for alms by beggars in rags. A fat Slovak peasant went towards the Kärntner Strasse carrying a basket of strong-smelling pinks. Two cabhorses, rejoicing in the names of "Am Graben" and "Am Stock im Eisen" hung their heads and dreamed of stalls with soft, clean straw, of golden hay, of drives to Heurig and through the lovely Wiener Wald, or by the Prater to the Lusthaus and up the Blumenkorso in the Hauptallee.

Helmerl Pötzl sat on the box of his cab, smoked his Virginia and counted the dull strokes of St. Stephen's clock which ushered in the ghost's hour.

"Drive us to the Hotel Imperial."

Helmerl came round with a start. He whipped the rugs off the horses' backs, picked up the reins and started off. He stared ahead in bewilderment. Wasn't that Loisi Kreitmeier who had just got into his cab with the gentleman? There wasn't a doubt about it. Where had she got all her finery from? Could she possibly be——?

At the Hotel Imperial, Helmerl——. Although she hung her head under her feather-trimmed hat, the cabman looked her straight in the face as she got out. So that was it!

Before long there was no secret as to what profession Loisi carried on. It had been rumoured that there was something peculiar about the post which the girl took as housekeeper but no one knew anything for certain.

When Loisi went to see her family and Mother Stiegler

on Sundays, the girls and women of the Seven Houses had shaken their heads and become very voluble over the visitor's expensive clothes. Sardonic remarks were passed openly and visions of orgies came to mind.

So when this male gossip, Helmerl Pötzl, divulged his "latest" in the Adam Inn one Sunday morning, Justine who had just brought the beer immediately repeated the tit-bit in the kitchen. Barbara, the cook, who could never stop talking, trailed every visitor to her kitchen with the remark: "Haven't you heard about Loisi Kreitmeier? She's turned whore. She wanders up and down the Kärntner Strasse picking up men!"

When Loisi passed the Seventh House that same afternoon, the men and women at the windows and in the fields hissed her. Toni Siwak, who was spreading her broad bosom over the ground-floor window-ledge of the Sixth House, spat audibly when Loisi went by.

"God in Heaven!" bawled Toni. "How can such creatures have the face to go among decent folk on a bright Sunday afternoon!"

Loisi started and felt a sharp pain in the region of the heart, but she held on her way undaunted. Sneers from every window kept her company. Suddenly she was seized by ungovernable fury. How dared this wretched Slovak, Toni Siwak, who as a girl had kept company with a fellow and had four illegitimate children, each by a different man—how dared she open her beastly mouth and sit in judgement on her? All these women, who practically always took their men without a spark of love—just like animals, in fact—had the impertinence to despise and condemn her!

She was trembling as she entered her parent's house. Nothing was known there yet. Her father and mother gave her a warm welcome. No one had ventured, or would ever venture, to breathe a word to the herculean Kreitmeier. It would have gone hard with the tale-bearer.

Loisi was deathly white as she sat on the sofa between the two windows. She did some hard thinking. Whatever happened, her parents must not find out. Some way out of the difficulty must be discovered—and very quickly.

"What's the matter, Loisi?" asked her mother anxiously. "You look very pale; are you ill?"

"No, but I've run upstairs too fast." She thought a

moment. "Oh, yes ; what I came to tell you was that I've found a little house for you with a bit of garden at Weidling am Bach. The rent's low and father can take his fret-saws and work there."

Loisi was lying, but it was absolutely essential that her parents should get out of the Seven Houses as soon as possible before they heard anything. The girl meant to start looking for somewhere suitable the very next morning.

Frau Stiegler had already heard the news. After Loisi had kissed little Mitzi, she sent the child out into the fields.

"Loisi," Mother Stiegler looked straight at the pretty girl who stared into space with tears in her eyes. "Loisi, is it true what they say about you ?"

Loisi's whole body shook with sobs.

"Frau Stiegler, you don't know why I've done it. You mustn't think hard of me."

"Oh, I know you've done it for Mitzerl and me, but I can't allow it ; I 'd rather work. Don't you know what it means, Loisi ? I'm only a silly old woman, but I was once young and all the lads liked me well enough, and I was never married, and each of my two children had a different father. But I never sold myself."

Loisi sobbed as if her heart would break.

"I'm not blaming you, Loisi ; I'm far too fond of you for that. But I couldn't look Feli in Heaven in the face if you hawked yourself about so that I needn't work and Mitzerl can be educated on the blood-money. Be a good girl, Loisi, and go back to the cigar factory."

"There's no going back for me, Frau Stiegler. I'm not going back to those old books again."

"Why don't you get married, Loisi ? A pretty girl like you."

"I'll never marry. Never. I loved Ferdl and there's no other man for me."

The old woman stared down at Loisi. Love such as that was something new to her. She knew nothing of such sentiments and considered them extravagant.

"Frau Stiegler, let me go on providing for you. I'll never come near the Seven Houses. Father and mother are going away too."

"Does your family know ?"

"For God's sake, no ! And they never must !"

Old Frau Stiegler went back to her washing at the Gürtlers. Her conscience and creed forbade her to take anything of Loisi's wages of sin. But little Mitzi must not be stinted even if in future she had to go without such pretty clothes.

In God's wisdom things turned out otherwise. Mother Stiegler had forgotten all about laundry work. When the bad weather came, she caught a severe cold and died soon after in the general hospital.

The Board of Guardians entrusted little Mitzi to the care of the Gürtlers.

Every month thirty gulden towards the cost of her education was sent by money order. It came from Loisi Kreitmeier who was now manageress of a prosperous hat factory in the Schottenfeldgasse.

Xaver Höllriegel had remained a bachelor. He had met Loisi late one night in a café. He fell in love with the pretty Brigittenau girl and took her to his house, after satisfying himself of her good character.

Loisi was a model housekeeper and also became Xaver's mistress, but to his requests to become his wife she returned an emphatic negative.

"Why not, Loisi, why not?"

"Because of what folk'll say if it ever comes out what I've been."

"I don't care a rap what folk say. I know perfectly well why you did it. At first I thought you were telling the tale, like so many girls do, but I'm absolutely certain now what a heart of gold you've got and I'm not asking anyone else. Don't you like me?"

"Oh yes, Xaver, I'm very fond of you, fonder of you than anyone else on earth except my people and Mitzi."

"But don't you like me as much as Ferdl?"

"Please, please don't mention his name. It was quite different between me and Ferdl and is dying slowly all the time. Be a good chap, Xaver, and never remind me of it."

Loisi stuck to her refusal and the hat manufacturer, who was nearly fifty, abandoned his knock-about life and went only twice a week to his tavern club at the Grüner Baum and once to the theatre with Loisi.

Herr Höllriegel spent the summer with Loisi and Mitzi at Kamptal and cared not a fig for the objections and

protests of his relations and friends against his living with the young girl.

"What does it matter to you?" he retorted angrily. "I'm perfectly happy and you can just leave me alone!"

The girl's parents had taken a little house in Kritzendorf and there passed a peaceful old age.

CHAPTER EIGHT

YEAR after year flowed by in the stream of time. Little Hartl Gürtler had become a fifteen-year-old boy. Tall and slim, with a muscular frame in which beat a true and warm Viennese heart. The golden legendary Viennese heart.

The boy had only stayed four and a half months with the Thima Company. The director of the world-famed acrobat troupe, the "Flying Devils", met Hartl at a gala performance in the Barokaldi arena in the municipal park of Budapest. He took a liking to the lad and they soon came to terms. Thima was glad enough to see the last of the young scamp. He wanted to give his show in Brigittenau again the following spring and was very much afraid that there would be more trouble with the police over the boy.

Three months later Hartl was flying from hand to hand and trapeze to trapeze high above the audience in the Alhambra in London. No such "flying man" had ever before been seen and the first to execute blindfold the double *salto* with pirouette, ending up in the hands of the "catch". He was the pride of the troupe and the main topic of conversation among the agents and in all the cafés haunted by artistes.

"The Flying Devils" were a very popular turn.

Hartl became the object of general admiration wherever he went, in North America, South America, the Transvaal, Australia and then England again, Spain and France. The director, an Italian of the name of Chiesi, set great store by the youngster, dressed him well, bought him presents and by the fourth year was already paying him a salary of five pounds a month. Hartl received free board in addition.

Hartl had lied to Signor Chiesi—who insisted, however, on being called "Mister"—about his position with regard to his family, and August Thima confirmed his prevarications to avoid difficulties. Mr. Chiesi believed that the boy entrusted to him in Budapest was an orphan foundling.

Hartl often suffered desperately from homesickness in the long years during which the troupe wandered round the globe. When he was ten he began to think more and more about his home. He sorrowed in secret but never dared talk about it. The lively Viennese street urchin had become a quiet, reserved young man who kept very much to himself and whose only recreation was books, more books and still more books. He read without discrimination everything he could lay hands on. He had a perfect command of French, Italian, English, Russian and Portuguese, learned extremely quickly and was a linguistic genius.

He was equally fond of the *colportage* novel and the great work of travel. Out of his savings he bought himself the large edition of Brehm's *"Tierleben"* and, notwithstanding the Direktor's protest, insisted on carrying his heavy cases of books about with him.

The love of animals grew within him and he made up his mind that when he was rich—and he was quite certain he was going to be—he would run a travelling menagerie.

While in San Paulo in Brazil he came across a great work on Vienna, bought it and spent his spare time studying the book. Now for the first time he came to know his native city, his beloved Vienna. He became completely enthralled by the founding of Vindobona, the Turkish period, and the hard times which had raged over his ever-gay Vienna.

There was quite a lot he too could write, thought Hartl. Especially of Brigittenau—Brigittenau which *was* Vienna to him.

There was little about Brigittenau in the book: only that Duke Leopold had knelt in prayer in the Danube and a cannon ball had just missed him. To commemorate the event there was the Brigitta Chapel, which had been erected close to the hunting-box on the Yägerau, not far from the Danube Canal. The same spot was also the scene of the execution of that bookseller champion of freedom, Robert Blum. In the year 1848 a platoon fired and a noble man had to sacrifice his life.

Hartl loved his Brigittenau twice as much as before. He shed tears in secret and often thought of his family but could not bring himself to let them know of his existence. Fear of his father and the punishment he expected kept him silent.

Oh, for another stroll through the familiar alleys of Brigittenau! Old memories returned. This out-of-the-way quarter of the Second District was unknown to most Viennese. It was only on the two-day Feast of St. Brigitta, when all work stopped and joy and pleasure reigned supreme, hundreds of drunkards rolled about the streets and scuffles innumerable enlivened the proceedings, that the "foreigners", mostly from the adjacent districts, came into Brigittenau to take part in the popular rejoicings.

The neighbourhood of the Seven Houses had its history, a history with a full share of mystery.

There was the Glogowatz tavern in the little Hofergasse behind the Seven Houses. The proprietor's buxom wife managed the business. A tragedy had been enacted there a few years before. The lady's first husband, an habitual drunkard, often beat his wife unmercifully when he was intoxicated. The barman, who was in love with his mistress, though she would have none of him, attacked the husband one night when he came home drunk and stabbed him from behind. His punishment was penal servitude for ten years.

Behind the Glogowatz tavern lay the gardens of the dark and mysterious Zechmann. His face was wreathed by a ragged beard. He was known and feared as a violent man. He treated his wife even worse than Glogowatz did his. He often drove her out into the street in her night-dress—even on the coldest winter nights—and the poor creature had to seek protection from their neighbours.

One morning the woman, after being missing for a week, was found at the bottom of the well.

All who knew Zechmann thought him guilty of the murder. He was interrogated by the police, but as nothing could be proved against him he had to be released. The canons of Klosterneuberg terminated his lease and he soon disappeared from the neighbourhood.

Hartl thought of all the tales related by the tenants of the Seven Houses—with nothing lost in the telling. The boys had always felt a nasty shiver down their spine when they passed the low house of Ranftl the nurseryman behind

the Construction Company's premises in Brigittenau. Something terrible had taken place there while Hartl was still a boy at school.

Ranftl had got into debt and to escape from his predicament he borrowed money from his old servant. His relations, who were also creditors, pressed for payment and egged on the old gardener to demand his money back too. The harassed debtor knew that the servant had still a few hundred gulden in his bedroom, in a cigar box which was hidden in his trunk.

The man gave notice for Martinmas. In the night before his service expired, Ranftl murdered him and buried him in the forcing-house used for cultivating mushrooms. The murderer stole the man's money and paid his most pressing debts.

Thereafter Ranftl never allowed anyone to enter the forcing-house. He fixed a great padlock on the wooden door and threw the key into the Danube Canal.

After the murder, Tyras, the dog, barked all night long on his chain. When Ranftl tried to beat the brute, he sprang at him and bit him in the arm.

The murderer's conscience gave him no rest. For months he worked hard all day and drank hard at night to try and forget his terror. He would slink past the forcing-house in which his victim lay. He often got up in the middle of the night, crept out of the house, and gazed with the fascination of horror at the place of his crime. He was obsessed with the idea that Sepp was not dead but living in the forcing-house and waiting to take his revenge if Ranftl ever entered the dark room. On such nights the dog's barking had a blood-curdling sound.

Things got worse with Ranftl from day to day. He dismissed all his labourers, male and female, and drudged in his garden by himself. He used to mutter and talk to himself the whole time. Rumours circulated in the neighbourhood, the authorities got wind of the matter and decided to make a search on the spot. They preferred to take the suspect unawares.

That night there was once again no peace for Ranftl. He decided to break into the forcing-house to satisfy himself that old Sepp was really dead. He supplied himself with an iron bar, crept up to the door behind which the murdered man lay buried, smashed the staple holding the padlock

and entered the place with a lantern. The arms of the crazy murderer cast long and fantastic shadows.

At that very moment the police officials arrived on the scene. They made their way cautiously through the yard, an inspector leading the way. The latter suddenly gave his men a signal to stop. He had caught sight of the man with the lantern standing in the low doorway of the forcing-house.

Tyras tugged furiously at his chain. But it was towards the scene of the murder and not at the intruders that he sprang.

Ranftl crept forward slowly to the spot where he had buried Sepp. The whole place was overgrown with mushrooms of all sizes.

Bending low, the murderer dug into the reddish brown manure. He did not notice that there were men standing in the doorway and watching him at work.

Suddenly Ranftl started, screamed aloud and sprang back with terror in his eyes. He raised his spade and appeared to be about to let fly at the spot he had disturbed when at that moment the police officers laid hold of him. The murderer fell down in a faint.

Even the hardened officials, ready for anything, were horror-stricken when they approached the place uncovered by Ranftl.

A clenched fist projected out of the manure. Thus was the crime against poor Sepp expiated.

Hartl shivered once again when he remembered these things. Even Brigittenau had its history.

There was something else the boy had retained—his love of Viennese music and song. Wherever Viennese music was to be heard the young patriot was there to hear it.

Childhood was gone and Hartl Gürtler was fifteen and had shot up slim and lanky. Through all these years he had lived in terror that the Direktor might accept an engagement for Vienna, in which case the whole tissue of lies in which Hartl had enshrouded himself would be torn asunder.

The day came.

The "Flying Devils" were finishing an engagement at the "Cirque d'Hiver" in Paris. The Direktor had decided to spend the following month, which was left open, in his home town, Ravenna. Three days before the farewell performance, Forbé, the agent, presented himself to Mr.

Chiesi with a telegram and ten minutes later a contract for "Danzers Orpheum" in Vienna was signed for the following month.

Hartl turned deadly pale when in the dressing-room that night his chief told him of the Vienna engagement.

Said Mr. Chiesi to his star as he was slipping with averted face into his tights:

"Well, Hartl, I guess you will be happy to see Vienna again after so many years?"

That night Hartl missed the "catcher's" arms three times and whizzed into the net.

It was only in the train on the way to Vienna that Hartl made a full confession to Mr. Chiesi. The Direktor was thunderstruck. He was an honest man, a father himself, and he could well imagine the misery of the lad's parents. Besides, he was very alarmed at the prospect of losing the boy. His father and mother would certainly want their child back. It was not business considerations alone which worried him so much. He had taken a great liking to the youngster and knew that he would miss the boy terribly if he were taken away.

Hartl had to face a torrent of reproach and exhortation.

"Look here, my boy, the moment we settle down in Vienna, you've got to go straight to your people, confess everything and ask for forgiveness."

"*Si, Signor Chiesi.*"

"D'you think your father will let you stay with the company?"

Hartl shrugged his shoulders. He was very much afraid that his parents would not let him remain with Mr. Chiesi and that his career as an artiste was over once and for all.

When the train crossed the Austrian frontier, a great longing for home came upon him.

The hills round Vienna came in sight and Hartl noted the names of the stations: Reckawinkel, Baumgarten, Hütteldorf. His heart thumped furiously. He was back in Vienna, his home town, and would soon be seeing his mother and father, Rosa, Milli and Adolf.

The train glided past a cemetery and his limbs shivered violently. Suppose his parents had died meanwhile! Broken-hearted perhaps at his silly escapade! No, no, his punishment could not be as bad as that.

The streets of Vienna lay in all the splendour of a sunny

winter's day. When the carriage passed the Liniengraben by the Mariahilfer Linie, Hartl thought of all his many battles with the lads from Thury and Himmelpfortgrund of which the Liniengraben behind the "Schöne Schäferin" had been the scene.

They passed through the Mariahilfer Strasse, a very busy one according to Viennese standards. All the cabs, commissionaires, roast-chestnut vendors and tram-horses seemed to be welcoming Hartl with a speech :

"Welcome, Hartl ! Welcome home, old friend. Are you really back at last ? Pleased to see you !"

Standing at the gate of the Burg-*gendarmerie* barracks was a giant member of that corps in his fine uniform with the great black plume on the helmet.

Next came the Burg. A Hungarian soldier in his narrow, yellow-braided trousers was stationed at the outer Burgtor, keeping a sharp look-out to see if the driver of the approaching court carriage lowered his whip as a signal that he had a member of the royal family inside and the guard must be called out.

The Franzensring with all its mighty and magnificent buildings !

Parliament, Rathaus, University, the Mölker Bastei, the Votive Church at the Schottentor.

On every hoarding were vast posters displaying the words "The Flying Devils" in big letters. Hartl thought hard. Suppose some of his relatives had seen the poster ? What if they had the remotest suspicion that he—who must surely have been given up for dead long ago—was a member of this company !

From the Alser Barracks emerged the Eighty-Fourth with band playing on its way to the changing of the guard. At its head the regimental drum-major with his long, red moustache, gracefully twirled his staff in the Brucker-Lager March. Next to the band, in the first file, marched Meister Komczak, the most popular bandmaster in Vienna after Ziehrer.

Hartl took everything in and his eyes were damp. He was another man since he had set foot in Vienna again. Vienna had made him a Viennese once more.

The cab turned into the dark Wasagasse at the end of which was "Danzers Orpheum". Ugly, bald tenement houses gave the street a depressing look.

The members of the company spent the whole day erecting their apparatus. Everything was done with the most meticulous accuracy.

The Chiesi Troupe made its headquarters at the "Goldener Lamm" in the Hahngasse. There had been no time during the day to get over to Brigittenau. Hartl's fear of going back to his parents' house increased mightily. The Company had an enormous success. Nothing like it had been seen in Vienna before. When the show ended, Hartl was greeted with cheers as he swung himself out of the net and ran down the ladder and through the rows of tables to the stage. An enthusiastic member of the audience, anxious to make himself popular with the young member of the troupe with the Italian name, caught hold of Hartl as he passed and called out:

"*Bravissimo, piccolo Italiano!*"

"*Nix Italiano,*" replied Hartl and burst out: "I'm a Viennese, I am; from Brigittenau."

Those who heard his remark promptly spread it abroad and the applause was more tumultuous than ever.

Next afternoon the boy, having yielded to his master's entreaties, had to face his ordeal.

Hartl put on his best suit, adorned himself with the gold watch given him by his master on his fifteenth birthday and started out with a heavy heart.

He walked slowly through the Rossau district along the Danube Canal. The snow crunched beneath his feet and a bitter wind blew down from the Kahlenberg into the Danube valley.

The Brigitta Bridge was covered in snow and the little river Alser poured its foaming waters over the ice-floes in the Danube Canal.

In the Wallensteinstrasse new houses, great blocks of tenements, had been built during Hartl's absence—just as ugly as their predecessors.

Hartl wandered up the Treustrasse. His old school in the Gerhardusgasse had no pleasant memories for him. Opposite on its left lay the ugly mortuary. Brother Max had once been carried in there, after he had taken his own life.

Hartl stopped for a moment by the little florists and laundries in the Klosterneuburger Strasse. He trembled

in every limb. Taking his courage in both hands, he continued on his way, turned into the Wenzelgasse, hurried through the short alley, and stopped at the Burkhartgasse corner.

The Seven Houses! There they stood, just as he had left them six and a half years ago. Nothing, absolutely nothing, had changed.

Up there behind the two corner windows in the second floor of the First House, was his parents' home. All round the Seven Houses the great vegetable gardens were lying in their winter sleep and winter's white mantle was spread over the beds.

Men, women and children passed the boy without taking much notice of him. Frau Bednar stared at him but did not recognize him, and old man Toni passed him on a "penny-farthing" and looked past him.

Breathing heavily, the prodigal entered the block. He mounted the six steps of the ground floor. Another name was on the porter's door. On a brass plate "Patuschka" was engraved in bold, red letters.

So Frau Wunderer, the old—, whom he had often annoyed so thoroughly, was no longer in charge. He knocked at the door. His words almost stuck in his throat as he put the question :

"Is Herr Gürtler still living on the second floor?"

"Yes, he's still there."

She surveyed the elegant young man from tip to toe.

Kati Mayer passed him without recognizing him. He must have changed enormously! On the second floor Rosl Stollhof almost collided with him. She apologized rudely and ran down stairs.

Hartl started in amazement. How tall she had grown! What a young lady she had become! Was it really so long since he had pulled her pig-tails?

Mini Kilwana was sitting on the window-ledge of the corridor—just as dishevelled as in years gone by. "Shaggy Nanny", he had nicknamed her, and her mother had rewarded him with a box on the ears.

He knocked reluctantly at his parents' door. No one answered. He pulled the bell-rope and the door opened. He was in the kitchen, which looked just the same as of old. Everything spotlessly clean. The wash-tubs stood by the fire and the water-jug and pails were ranged on the bench.

Hartl straightened his coat, made a dash and knocked at the door leading into the parlour. A man's voice called out:

"Come in!"

The boy stepped in slowly, crushing his hat in his hand; there seemed to be a veil before his eyes. On the sofa between the windows his father was sitting, spectacles on nose and a newspaper in his hand. Above his head hung Hartl's photograph, framed in a mourning wreath. The old man looked in surprise over the edge of his glasses at the intruder. He did not recognize his son.

Hartl sighed. His father had grown old and white-haired.

Gürtler was somewhat astonished at the peculiar way in which the boy stared at him.

"What d'you want? Is it Adolph you're after?"

The blood fled from Hartl's face. His father did not recognize him! He tried to speak, stepped forward, gulped and then suddenly fell at the old man's feet and cried:

"Father, father! Don't you know me? I'm your Hartl!"

The newspaper in Gürtler's hand trembled, he almost fainted, recovered himself, pulled up the boy's head, looked into his eyes and with tears running down his cheeks cried:

"Hartl! Hartl! Is it you, lad, and alive?"

"Father, father, oh, forgive me, forgive me!" The words came out amidst sobs.

Emilie came out of the bedroom, thinking her father had gone crazy and was calling out for his absent child. The tall young girl stood stiff with amazement in the doorway.

"Milli, quick, quick! Fetch mother out of the wash-house; Hartl's here, Hartl's here!"

"Marand Joseph," stammered Milli, her face deathly pale, and rushed out of the room to bring her mother. She ran down the stairs three at a time, muttering over and over again:

"Marand Joseph, Hartl."

Milli flung the door of the wash-house open. The place was full of steam, with Frau Gürtler and her washer-women bustling about like so many ghosts.

"Mother, mother, don't be scared. Hartl's back!"

Frau Gürtler stood rigid; her very heart seemed to stop.

"Mother, mother, wake up! Hartl is upstairs with father!"

Old Frau Gürtler stumbled up the stairs while her

daughter did not take her eyes off her. In view of the exceptional occurrence the washerwomen had stopped work and now followed Frau Gürtler.

Hartl was still on his knees and had buried his face in his father's lap. Both were crying. Not a word was said. The old man's hand softly stroked the boy's hair.

"Is it true, is it true?" asked Frau Gürtler hoarsely, standing in the doorway.

"Get up, Hartl. Your mother's here."

The boy quickly rose to his feet. His mother gazed in amazement into a strange face. Could *this*, this long, lanky young man be her little Hartl?

"Mother, don't be angry, forgive me."

She had recognized him now. The tension in her face relaxed, she began to tremble; she could not have said herself what drove her to do it, but her hand caught Hartl's cheeks two resounding smacks and then the old woman fainted.

CHAPTER NINE

THE Seven Houses had their sensation.

It was the talk of the place. The news ran from house to house, story to story, door to door.

Richard Gürtler, that idle, good-for-nothing, thieving young rapscallion of a Richardl Gürtler, had come back. Imagination got to work. While some whispered that the boy had been in Korneuberg Reformatory, others talked of his having been kidnapped by gipsies. Others again gave tongue to a suspicion that the returned prodigal was not Hartl at all.

When the news of the truant's return spread abroad that evening, the boy's old friends hurried round to the Gürtlers to welcome their crony. Hartl had gone, but they were told that he would be at home the next morning, Sunday, and no doubt delighted to see them all again.

Adolf passed round a photograph of his brother, showing Hartl in his acrobat's tights. They all gazed upon it in awestruck admiration.

"He's become an artiste: he can fly round in the air."

The news spread rapidly and many a nose was turned up in contempt.

"Well, I'm blessed, a beggar going round with the hat! His people can't be very proud of him."

The following Sunday, uncles, aunts, and cousins hastened from all quarters of Vienna. Such an opportunity of reproaching their poor relations with Hartl's bad bringing-up was not to be lost. The appropriate speeches were actually prepared on the way to Brigittenau, the intention being to lay it on thick.

In the family joy reigned triumphant since Hartl's return. The father was in high spirits, and the mother sang all day while she and her daughters ironed for dear life.

Adolf, now an expert locksmith, showed everyone his brother's photograph, and proudly announced his coming appearance in "Danzers Orpheum".

When Hartl entered the Seventh House (which was really No. 4) at nine o'clock on the Sunday, he had to run the gauntlet through a solid human wall.

Curiosity had brought out not only the tenants and his old friends but also a good crowd from the other houses. They all wanted to see the runaway who went about dressed up like a "gawlier".

"Welcome, Hartl! Welcome! Welcome, old friend!"

Hands were offered on all sides and curious looks directed critically at his face and clothes. The eyes of women and girls brightened, for they liked the boy. He turned through the gate to the steps. People crowded round him, and cries of welcome greeted him on all sides. There were many of those present—victims of his pranks—who would not have had such friendly looks for Hartl eight years before!

On the second floor were marshalled his sisters and brothers, in addition to its normal population. Between Emilie and Rosa stood a pretty girl who surveyed Hartl from head to foot with great blue eyes.

"This is Mitzerl. Don't you remember her, Hartl? Frau Stiegler's little granddaughter."

But Hartl could not recall the child; in any event, he had never taken the slightest interest in girls.

Rosl Stollhof stepped up to her old friend with a sweet smile. She put out her hand and gave him a roguish look.

"How big and smart you've grown, Hartl. You're quite a fine gentleman. Did you recognize me the other day when I passed you on the stairs?"

Rosl had become a pretty and most dainty young person, and Hartl gazed at her in amazement.

"Of course I recognized you at once; you still have your lovely long pigtails and your great big eyes."

"Heavens, Hartl! I shan't know you if you talk like that! You spout like a book. Talk plain, like you used to!"

"I must go up to mother now, but I'll come outside afterwards."

On this day of rejoicing there was high festival in the Gürtler's flat. Cutlets were frying on the kitchen fire, a potato salad already adorned the table, and there was a merry blaze in the stoves of the parlour and living-room. Above the little photograph of Hartl hung a large framed picture of the "Flying Devils".

None of the relations had yet arrived.

Adolf admired his brother's gold watch, and little Mitzi, who was really quite big, could not take her great questioning eyes off the handsome boy.

Hartl was made to reel off all his news at once, of the countries he had visited and all the fine things he had seen. His parents forgot all their years of sorrow, and Frau Gürtler, who, still moved with the times for all her fifty-five years, became a new woman. The father looked proudly at his son and kept on repeating that he had always said that Hartl would come back.

But the pleasure of being alone with Hartl was short-lived. The Rudolfsheimers were the first to arrive. Uncle Adolf, Aunt Resi, and their three daughters. Uncle Adolf was a Civil Servant and had forgotten that it was his sister, Frau Gürtler, who had once kept her brother's heads above water when she was still living in the Wald-viertel and had something to give away.

Hard on their heels followed Aunt Marie, Aunt Wetti, and a few cousins, male and female.

Hartl had to deal with a vast number of questions. His answers, which were truthful in every detail, were met by incredulous and ironical glances exchanged between the relations.

"Fancy you bein' a clown an' a fool an' goin' round begging with a plate!"

"You have led your parents a dance!"

"Anyone could have told you he'd do no good."

"It's all the fault of your bringing-up!"

The complaints, queries, and insults fairly beat down upon the unfortunate Hartl. The lad, a figure of misery, sat in a chair and looked helplessly at his parents.

At length his mother sprang up, her face white as a sheet, and her words poured out:

"Leave the boy alone! He's learned something and achieved something. He's as decent and straight as ever. Because we're poor you're always picking holes in our children, though there isn't a straighter lot anywhere. Thank God! You've all forgotten how I helped you when things were going well with us."

"Don't get excited, Resi," Gürtler interrupted, "they don't mean it unkindly."

Aunt Wetti expressed a desire to see the gold watch. Hartl took it off its chain and handed it to her.

"Isn't it brass, really?"

"Look inside the back," Aunt Marie instructed her; "if it's stamped it's brass."

The Rudolfsheimers's Sidi was a clever girl. She found the stamp. With an awestruck look she handed the watch round.

"It's genuine; eighteen carat."

"Then he's stolen it," whispered Aunt Wetti.

"He'll come to the gallows all right."

"Yes, we'll see him in court some day, like Hugo Schenk and Schlossarek.*

The orgy of whispering continued.

Then Uncle Karl inquired: "Where's his luggage?"

"At the hotel," replied Rosa, proud to announce that her brother was staying at an hotel.

"But why doesn't he sleep at home?"

"Because it's too late after the evening performance for him to get here."

"Just look at him, he's dressed up like a pimp," muttered Aunt Wetti once more.

"Hartl earns eighty gulden a month and everything found," said his brother and looked round in triumph.

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* Celebrated criminals who murdered girls, and were executed at Vienna.

"He can go and tell that to the marines," murmured Aunt Wetti, and the others nodded.

Hartl felt extremely uncomfortable and was only too glad when the soup was brought in and the vocal organs of his dear relations turned to criticism of the food. His uncle found the cutlets too well done and others thought the salad too tart. It had not occurred to one of them to bring along so much as a cake or some similar trifle; nor had any of them reflected that they were putting a heavy strain on the means of these poor people.

They were anxious to have further details of the acrobatic feats which Hartl performed, but he told them to wait for the evening performance. Mr. Chiesi had presented Hartl with a dozen free tickets for his relatives and Hartl had bought another dozen. And there was always one over for Rosl Stollhof.

At half-past two Mr. Chiesi appeared in a cab, to make the acquaintance of the boy's parents and also fetch him for the afternoon performance.

The relations stared at the handsome Italian—with his broken German—as if he had been a two-headed calf.

He addressed Hartl in English:

"Now, my boy, how is everything? All right? Will they all come to-night and have a look at you."

"Yes, Mr. Chiesi, they all will come. They don't know what work I am doing. It is better they see it."

Mouths, eyes and ears were all open wide. What language were they talking. Sidi felt called upon to explain that it was English. She had understood the words "yes" and "all right." Aunt Resi gazed proudly at her clever daughter.

Father Gürtler entered into conversation with Mr. Chiesi. He knew a certain amount of Italian. He had been in the Italian campaign under Father Radetzky and picked some up there.

Notwithstanding the icy cold, everyone threw up the windows to see Hartl leave in his master's cab.

In order to be in time for the performance his sisters began to dress as early as five o'clock. In Hartl's honour they each wore three starched white petticoats. They must look their best for the sake of their famous brother. By six o'clock Rosl Stollhof was ready and sitting in the

bedroom with Rosa and Milli, doing her best to hurry them up.

They all left the house at seven. Certain of Hartl's old friends and a few neighbours joined the procession. Further contingents from the other houses and the nurseries set out for the Ninth District. Everyone wanted to see the young scamp, Hartl Gürtler, in the rôle of Punchinello.

The family sat together at small tables in the centre of the hall. Despite a dig in the ribs from Aunt Resi, Uncle Adolf decided to cut a dash and ordered three litres of table wine. The girls drank Kracherl.*

Each item on the programme was greeted with enthusiastic applause. The interval, during which the net for the "Flying Devils" was suspended above the heads of the audience, seemed far too long, and when a bell announced its conclusion the whole family was trembling with excitement.

Aunt Wetti leaned over to Aunt Marie and whispered: "It's enough to make us die with shame to have such a scamp in a respectable family like ours."

The tune which was summoning absentees back to the hall came to a sudden stop. A bell rang. The orchestra struck up a gavotte, the curtain was raised, and the four "Flying Devils" appeared from the left wing.

In honour of Hartl's people, the director had given out the best silk tights. They were flesh-coloured, with dark red, gold-tipped fringes.

The troupe was greeted with a storm of applause. The Gürtlers gazed admiringly at their boy, while the relations were grievously disappointed that Hartl was not dressed as Harlequin.

The acrobats crossed the orchestra-pit on a raised platform and descended into the body of the theatre to reach the rope-ladders up to the nets.

As Hartl passed his mother he bent down and kissed her on the lips.

Rosl Stollhof's eyes were gleaming and her cheeks flaming as she watched Hartl go by.

Mother Gürtler shivered with fear as she saw her boy climb up to the dome of the roof. Her hands trembled as

* Raspberry juice and soda.

he began his performance with the easy tricks, flinging himself from the swinging trapeze into Mr. Chiesi's outstretched hands, then with a pirouette catching the empty trapeze as it came towards him and thus returning to his platform.

The more difficult feats followed. The audience stared upwards, spellbound. Storms of clapping greeted each turn. Even the aunts, uncles and cousins cheered Hartl, for it was obvious that the lion's share of the applause was for him.

Every time he jumped Frau Gürtler gave a little shriek: she did not see the boy throwing kisses to her.

On a signal from above the orchestra struck up a tune. Hartl never failed to be amused at this part of the performance. For all he cared, six military bands could have blown the roof off without causing him to fail. He was absolutely sure of himself.

"Are you ready?" asked Mr. Chiesi, hanging down from his trapeze, amidst a deathly silence.

"I am ready," replied Hartl cheerily.

"All right then, go!"

Hartl swung downwards; he was blindfolded and could actually see nothing.

He swung backwards and forwards twice, shot himself up by his feet, turned a double somersault, executed a pirouette and was neatly caught by Mr. Chiesi. The empty trapeze swung backwards and forwards; at a given signal Hartl let go his chief's hands, whirled round in circles, caught the bar of the trapeze on its approach, hurled himself back on to the springboard and ripped the handkerchief from his eyes.

The ensuing storm of clapping was like a salvo of artillery. The audience screamed itself hoarse. There was a perfect chorus of "Bravo!"

Frau Gürtler sat white as death in her seat, and was on the point of fainting. Her husband and Rosa reassured her.

"Don't be silly, mother, nothing can happen to him, that's what the net's for."

All the acrobats except Hartl had now climbed down and stood expectantly on the stage. The applause was as vociforous as ever.

Hartl swarmed up a rope to the dome where there was

a fixed trapeze. There was an introductory blast from the orchestra, and the audience stared breathlessly at the acrobat swinging in the full glare of the searchlights.

There was a cry of "Silence!" from the stage.

"Orchestra!" shouted Hartl from above.

The drums rolled and the boy suddenly dropped from his lofty perch, whizzed through the air, caught the rings, and after three rapid somersaults landed on his back in the nets. Twice and thrice the boy rebounded, then he got up and ran to the edge.

If the applause was great before, it was now positively thunderous. As Hartl ran down the gangway between the seats, a pretty young woman jumped up impulsively, flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. As he passed his mother he gave her a friendly tap on the shoulder. In his excitement he did not notice that she was pale as death. The curtain went up again and again, and even after it had descended for the fifth time he was called three times.

"Take me out, Rosa, I don't want to see any more: I'll wait for you outside." Frau Gürtler got up.

Hartl sat in the dressing-room panting hard. He was particularly delighted with his success, for he had now shown that he was not the good-for-nothing everyone supposed him to be. Perhaps his wretched aunts would now keep their mouths shut. He had not failed to catch the insults and insinuations which had been bandied about that day, insults in which such words as swindler and gallows figured. He was proud, but not conceited.

Folks from the Seven Houses and their vicinity excelled themselves in raving over Hartl Gürtler. Anyone at the neighbouring tables who was willing to listen was informed that this boy, the great artiste, was a Brigittenau from the Seven Houses. They were all extremely proud of him, as proud as if the young man's achievements were their own. All his old pranks were forgotten and they all swore they had been saying for years that the boy would be a great man some day.

"He could smash twenty frames to-day an' I wouldn't say a word," cried Jakish enthusiastically to old Pepi.

Franzl Nimmrichter gave Poldl Piffl a poke in the ribs. 'Te ll you what, Poldl, I'll ask Hartl and his family round

this week and you can get me all the stuff in. I don't care what it costs; it's an honour for me."

Hartl had never dreamed that he would ever be such a highly respected member of the Seven Houses community.

The following night Frau Gürtler persuaded her husband to take Hartl away from the troupe. She would never have a minute's peace, she said, while she knew that Hartl might be a cripple any day. She adhered to her demand in the face of all objections. His sisters, Adolf and even some of the relations, tried to convince her that nothing could happen to the boy, that nothing had happened to him in the last six years and he would never have another chance of earning so much money. It was wasted effort. The next day Gürtler called on Mr. Chiesi at his hotel and informed him that at his mother's request he must take the boy away from the troupe.

Chiesi had always feared this and seen it coming, so he returned with Gürtler to Brigittenau to make one last effort to induce the mother of his star to change her mind. "The lad is as well looked after with me as he would be at home," said the Italian, "I treat him as my own child. Nothing can ever happen to him, because we take every precaution. From the first of next month I am going to pay Hartl fifteen English pounds a month, that is a hundred and eighty gulden. He gets his keep, boots, clothes and linen free and he's also insured. And if the troupe breaks up he can carry on himself under the same name."

It was all in vain. The only concession Chiesi obtained was that Hartl should remain with him for the rest of the month, after which he must come home and learn a trade.

"I'll tell you one thing, Madam," said Mr. Chiesi, "the boy will go sick if you take him away from a calling he's got really fond of. It's no good putting him in a factory; that's not in his line."

All, all in vain. When Hartl heard that he was leaving the the end of the month and would never be an acrobat again, the very light of life was extinguished for him. When he saw that his mother's resolution was unshakable, he became even more taciturn than before. He sought consolation in his books but there was none to be found. He would stare at the letters and read a page or two, but he

did not know what he was reading and dissolved in tears when he thought himself unobserved. Hartl looked up his uncle, the Provost, and asked him to intercede with his mother. The ecclesiastical gentleman had also spent an evening at the Orpheum, and come away amazed at his nephew's great courage and skill. Monsignor was a tolerant, open-minded priest; he saw nothing disastrous in Hartl's choice of a calling, nor anything of the danger which loomed so large in his mother's eyes. He called on his sister one day and put in a good word for the lad. It was no use. Although Frau Gürtler was very much attached to her brother, she remained absolutely unmoved.

The battle raged throughout the whole month. Hartl declared that he would never learn a trade and would rather die. This last threat roused the hostility of his father, who had hitherto stood by him. Gürtler had never got over Maxl's suicide, though ten years had since elapsed. When Hartl threatened to destroy himself his father burst out:

"Be silent, be silent! Say that again and I'll have no more to do with you!"

Dr. Rosenthal, the old family doctor sent for Hartl to his surgery.

"Do you want your mother to die!" Hartl stared at the doctor.

"Look here, my lad. Your mother has a very bad heart, and your thoughtless action is largely responsible for it. But you were then a silly boy who did not realize what he was doing. Now you must try to make up for the harm you did. If you go away again without your mother's permission, her days are numbered. Your mother has had too much to bear in life; she must not be exposed to any more shocks."

Hartl listened attentively to the doctor's words and gave in. But he talked even less than before.

The last performance, to celebrate Richardl Gürtler's farewell to the troupe, developed into an imposing demonstration by the whole of Brigittenau.

The nurserymen banded together to present bouquets to the boy of whom they were so proud.

The advanced bookings for the last evening broke all records. There were few seats left on the night itself.

The excellent and entirely novel performance of the

troupe and the fact of Hartl's being a native of Brigittenau had become known throughout the whole district. Everyone who possibly could, booked in advance.

Annerl Kraus sold her mattress to get a ticket for "Danzer's Orpheum". Among those who took tickets for themselves and their families were two town-councillors and the brandy merchant Traube, an overseer of the poor.

Rosl Stollhof was a changed being since Hartl's return. First love, a true, passionate love was awakened in the heart of this girl of fourteen. Hartl Gürtler was her god. Her thoughts were busy with him day and night, and her heart seemed to break when she saw the loved one looking so sad. Her eyes followed him wherever he went. When he appeared at his father's house in the morning she was on the stairs, and the first to greet him. She kept her eyes glued on him and was overjoyed when he shook hands and spoke a few words to her. She was continually being overwhelmed by a longing to throw her arms round his neck and kiss those soft lips, and she had to exercise the greatest restraint to refrain from doing so. Young Rosl knew now what love's pain meant.

There was another maiden who had lost her heart to Hartl, though still unconscious of love itself. She attached herself to him whenever he appeared, watched him hungrily all the time, and would not leave his side.

This was the twelve-year-old Mitzi Stiegler. Although the Gürtler family treated her as their own child, and she never had the feeling that she was a stranger, Mitzi had always had a feeling that there was something lacking. She barely remembered her grandmother, and although her summer holiday with Aunt Loisi was tremendous fun and nothing was left undone to make her happy, she missed a mysterious, unknown something.

From the first moment she saw Hartl, all idle thoughts deserted her and she was as merry as a lark, and wanted the whole world to share her happiness.

Mitzi went to the "Orpheum" every evening with Adolf. She had to sit right at the back at the performer's table, but although this was far from the stage the fact did not worry her in the least. It was the best place for seeing the acrobats.

When Hartl appeared on the stage at his farewell performance, his name was yelled aloud in chorus. There

were at least two hundred representatives of Brigittenau in the audience, among them the Gürtler family, with the exception of the mother.

Rosl Stollhof was in the first row. Hartl had given her a ticket. Her face burned when her beloved appeared on the stage. She devoured him with her eyes and a gentle shudder ran down her spine.

Hartl noticed Rosl, smiled at her, and when he came down and passed her she snatched his hand and gently squeezed it. The boy squeezed hers in return, and thus in Rosl's heart the seal was set upon their love.

"Hartl Gürtler! Hartl Gürtler! Hartl Gürtler! Three cheers for the boy! Three cheers for the Brigittenau boy!"

Cries of welcome and greeting rose on all sides, but he was so stricken with grief that he had to keep a tight hold over himself not to burst into tears.

The performance passed off without a hitch amidst a continuous roar of applause. The enthusiasm of the good folk of Brigittenau infected the other spectators and they, too, paid their tribute to the reckless daring of the youngster.

Unobserved by the public, stage hands piled up garlands, bouquets and baskets of flowers on the stage. Enormous bows in black and gold and red and white, with cards bearing Hartl Gürtler's name in gilt lettering, adorned these fragrant gifts.

When Hartl appeared on the stage for the last time, an attendant hung a large laurel wreath, with wide black and yellow bows, round his shoulders.

Hartl was called before the curtain time and time again. He was holding a little bunch of forget-me-nots which Rosl had thrown to him. His eyes glistened, and once more it was sheer will-power alone that kept back his tears. The orchestra gave forth blast after blast in his honour.

The town-councillor, Turetschek, the pork-butcher, full of wine and enthusiasm, rose in his box and bawled out:

"Silence! silence! don't go away, my boy, stay where you are! I've something to say!"

The audience gave ear, and the din slowly subsided.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to say a few words. That boy up there, who has become such a great artist in

his profession, is one of us. He's a Viennese boy from our own Brigittenau. How few Viennese know anything of our lovely Brigittenau. We grow everything out there. Cabbages, turnips, cucumbers, pretty girls, and—as you can see for yourselves—even great artistes. This is our Richardl Gürtler's day of glory ; he is a Viennese, a son of Austria. Hail to our city of Vienna and our fair Austria ! Hip ! hip ! hurrah !"

The audience cheered lustily and the orchestra struck up the March—"*Oh, du mein Österreich*".

Hartl bowed once again, and then the curtains came down and then he felt as if the very sun had been blotted out of his life. In the dressing-room, he flung himself down on his trunk and wept bitterly.

Mr. Chiesi turned away from the others so that they should not see the tears in his eyes, tears brought there by the boy whom he had grown to love so well in six long years.

CHAPTER TEN

THE steam syren announced the dinner-hour in the workshops. Levers threw the driving-belts on to the intermediate pulleys, the transmission slowly decelerated and after a time came to a stop.

The workmen—turners, moulders, cleaners and apprentices, stood round the taps, washing their hands.

Richard Gürtler, once the star of the acrobat troupe known as the "Flying Devils", and now an apprentice in the "Kron and Neutra" foundry and hydrometer factory in the Dresdner Strasse, in Zwischenbrücken, rolled up the sleeves of his blue smock. The play of muscles and biceps could be seen as he washed his hands.

"In a daydream again, the silly ass," remarked Franzl Strehl, one of Hartl's mates. "Just as if he couldn't count up to three, Mr. Acrobat !"

Hartl looked round at the speaker, who smiled in some confusion.

Shortly after his arrival in the factory, Gürtler had won the respect of his fellows. Franzl Strehl was known to be a great fighter and was much feared by all the apprentices. One evening, after the men had knocked off, and

Strehl was indulging in a stream of sneering allusions to Punchinello and Harlequin, Hartl quietly told him he had better keep his mouth shut or it would be shut for him. Thereupon Strehl stripped off his coat and went for the newcomer.

"Come on, comedian!"

Hartl had learned boxing in England. Franzl Strehl would feign have retained his reputation as a bully, but the muscular, and well-trained Hartl gave him no time to breathe. He beat his enemy black and blue, and when the humiliated bully drew a knife, Hartl administered a solar plexus which felled Hanzl again. He lay on the ground, white as death, and writhing with pain.

Thenceforward the apprentices had a great respect for Hartl.

Under the arches of the *Nord-West-Bahn* his mother waited for him with his dinner. Since he had had to leave Mr. Chiesi, Hartl had grown morose and lost his appetite.

"Come, Hartl, you'll fall ill," said his mother.

"I am not hungry, mother."

Every evening, when work was over, Rosl Stollhof waited for Hartl. She had become his little innocent lover. She listened to all his woes, consoled, and encouraged him. He did some training every day, and Rosl was the happy spectator, and admired him more every time. She liked kissing, and taught the art to Hartl, who had hitherto known nothing about it. They went for solitary walks, and when spring came they would sit by the banks of the Danube Canal clasping each other's hands and kissing.

At home there were frequent quarrels over the boy between the parents. His father realized the boy's misery and feared it might lead to dangerous thoughts. He lived in a state of constant anxiety, lest Hartl should be contemplating suicide—a tragedy which had already happened once in the family.

Dr. Rosenthal was called in to advise.

"I can only tell you not to keep the lad too tight; he'll never be a metal-turner, however long he lives, and it's much more likely he'll go to ruin if you keep him at it. It's certain that he is pining away. In these cases it often

takes but a small thing for a boy to lose his mental balance, and then he's past saving."

"But whatever shall we do?"

"Dear Frau Gürtler, it's only a few months since I was myself advising Hartl to leave the acrobats for his mother's sake; to-day you must excuse me for saying that I can only advise you to let the boy go back to his old occupation or it will go badly with him."

On Sundays Rosl Stollhof had to do without Hartl's company, on that day little Mitzi claimed him for her own. She was wildly jealous of Rosl, and had often followed them on their outings. When she saw them kissing she was stricken with despair and cried in her sleep. She never said a word to Hartl, but carried her sad secret locked away in her heart.

At eight o'clock prompt on Sunday morning, Schani Schwazl appeared at the house with his smart cab, to take Mitzi and Hartl to Loisi Kreitmeier's. The pair spent the day there, and there was good food, music and books. Hartl played the mandoline extremely well and Mitzi had a pure and lovely little voice. Hartl's sisters often came along too, and there were round games and Viennese song.

Both Loisi and Herr Höllriegel became very fond of Hartl. Loisi was very angry with Frau Gürtler for taking Hartl away from his profession. She had been to the "Orpheum" with Höllriegel and admired Hartl's skill.

The silk hat manufacturer placed his whole library at Hartl's disposal and told him what, and how, to read.

On these Sundays Hartl was almost happy. Curiously enough, he hardly missed Rosl at all on these occasions. Mitzi never left his side and was in the seventh heaven whenever he spoke to her.

Loisi noticed what was happening to the child but took good care not to say a word for fear of destroying something pure and holy.

On May 10th Hartl celebrated his sixteenth birthday. It was a Sunday.

When he came out of the bedroom into the parlour, Mitzi jumped up at him with tear-stained eyes, flung her arms around him, and wished him many happy returns. On the table were the coffee things and a large plum cake. His sisters also gave him birthday greetings and produced

their presents. Loisi and Herr Höllriegel had sent some nice books and invited the whole family for the day.

His mother came proudly up to him and gave him a kiss, a new tie and a telegram from Mr. Chiesi which informed him that he was expected for certain on May 24th for rehearsals at Bucharest, "*Établissement Hugo*", for Hartl was to re-join the troupe on June 1st. The boy did not take it all in at first, but looked questioningly at his mother and father.

"Yes, yes, it's all right; it's not a joke. You are going back to your troupe."

Hartl kissed his mother's hands. He knew what it had cost her before she had brought herself to the point of letting her boy go away again.

A mother's heart can conquer anything.

There was great excitement in the family, which set about its preparations for the visit to Loisi and Herr Höllriegel.

On the steps Hartl met Rosl. She wished him many happy returns and handed him a huge scarlet tie.

"Have you heard the latest, Rosl? I am going back to my troupe next Sunday."

Rosl turned as white as the wall against which she stood.

"Going away? Going right away? Away from me, Hartl? I'll die, Hartl!"

She utterly forgot where she was, burst into tears, and flung her arms round her darling, pressing her lips fiercely to his mouth.

"Don't be silly, Rosl. Come and meet me at the works to-morrow, and we'll talk it all over."

The six days passed swiftly. The whole family, with the exception of his mother, were gathered round Hartl at the station, Close by stood the Budapest express.

Hartl's mother had said good-bye to her boy at home, forcing back her tears, pressing her hands on her beating heart, and exhorting him always to be an honest man.

In his arms Hartl was carrying his little fox-terrier, Puppy. He had acquired this fine dog, with the faithful eyes at the time he left the troupe six months before, The animal was extremely attached to its young master.

and snapped at anyone who as much as approached him. Puppy was to accompany him into far-away lands.

In addition to the family, Herr Höllriegel, Loisi and Rosl had come to the station to see Hartl off.

Rosl's eyes were swollen. Since she had acquired the certainty that her beloved was leaving her, she had fallen ill and refused to eat or sleep. She and Hartl had already said their good-byes on the previous evening, and Hartl had sworn that he would never look at any other girl, and would come back to marry her later on. Long had she hung on his neck, and threatened to throw herself in the Danube if he ever had another girl.

Mitzi did not leave Hartl's side until the train drew out.

When it had left the station, Rosl collapsed on a seat sobbing bitterly. Loisi was sorry for her, and consoled her as best she could. She remembered all the misery she had suffered with Ferdl Stiegler.

Mitzi looked angrily at Rosl and said to Emilie, who was crying hard:

"Goodness, she ought to be ashamed of herself!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE doctors were gathered round Richard Gürtler's bed in the city hospital. Professor Marinescu expatiated on the case.

"The right knee-cap was fractured, the left ankle broken, and both shoulder-joints were dislocated. Curiously enough, in spite of his considerable fall, the young man has not suffered any internal injuries." The learned gentleman gave his disquisition in Latin: "The knee-cap and ankle are treated, but of course the young man will never be able to resume his occupation as an acrobat."

A pale and emaciated Hartl lay in the white bed. His leg was still in splints and he was looking at the professor with frightened, inquiring eyes. He was always asking whether he would be able to take up his work again, and the Professor was always ready with words of comfort or the boy for whose recovery he had done anything humanly possible.

"How am I getting on, Professor? When shall I be able to get up?"

"Patience, young man, before long, before long."

Hartl had been here a month already. He was worried not only about his chances of working again, but also because Mr. Chiesi had answered none of his letters. It was certain, too, that he had not sent any money to his parents as he had promised to do, nor had Hartl received any news from home. Mr. Chiesi had certainly promised to send postcards to Vienna from every place they stopped at. Rosl's letter alone had reached him.

Whatever would become of him? Why should he, he of all people, be the victim of such a great catastrophe? When he joined the troupe at Bucharest, everything had gone as well as ever after the first few rehearsals. They had practised three to four hours a day and even added some new tricks to their repertoire.

On the third evening after the first performance, a wire of the swinging trapeze broke, and Hartl fell sideways over the edge of the net. He came down with his knee on a table and was carried out unconscious.

And now he was lying here week after week. Mr. Chiesi had gone away three days after the accident. He had paid a sum of money into the hospital coffers for keep and medical expenses, and handed the treasurer an extra five hundred lei to be paid out to Hartl on his leaving hospital. He had told Hartl of this deposit for him, and instructed him to rejoin the troupe immediately on his release. The boy waited day after day for news of the troupe and became increasingly despondent. Why didn't his master write? All sorts of ideas came into his head, and he became firmly convinced that his case was incurable and that Mr. Chiesi must certainly have been told so by the professor. Yet his dark suspicions were always tempered by the reflection that Mr. Chiesi was a kind man. Could it be that he was now showing his true character because Hartl could work no longer? His young, soft heart would admit no such insinuation.

When he recovered consciousness after the accident he had seen that Mr. Chiesi's eyes were full of tears. Hartl begged him, whatever happened, not to say anything to his parents about the matter. His master promised

everything he asked, and also that he would send them sixty gulden every month.

Hartl knew that the troupe was under contract to appear in America on the 1st August, and had entered into a four-weeks' engagement with "Koster and Bial" on 34th Street and Broadway. This was to be followed by a nine-months' tour through the States. Hartl began to fear that his chief had stopped sending money to his parents, and also broken his promise of silence. In desperation he wrote to Rosl, telling her shortly of a little accident that had happened to him, and begging her not to mention the matter to his father and mother. Without exciting any suspicion she was to find out whether postal orders were arriving each month for his parents.

Hartl threatened that if she repeated anything of what he told her, everything would be at an end between them.

A week later he received Rosl's letter. He tore open the envelope with trembling hands:

DEAR HARTL,

It is Sunday to-day, my mother has gone out, and so this is my first opportunity of writing to you. I was absolutely desperate at having no news from you. You must have received three letters from me, and yet in your letter, in which you haven't even sent me one kiss, you say nothing about my letters.

Your mother has been receiving money by post. Emilie was crying when she told me that your mother is very much hurt because you don't write to her. At the moment she is not so upset because she is expecting a letter from America from you, and your father has told her that she will have to wait a few weeks.

Dear Hartl, I am always thinking of you, and was ever so happy when your letter arrived. My mother has just had another row with Frau Siebenmutter—our next-door neighbour, you know—because the postman came and she didn't notice it. Do you love me as much as ever? Karl Pschick is still running after me and wanted to "play grown-ups" with me, but I told him straight out that I had already played grown-ups with you, so he leaves me alone now. I'm putting a forget-me-not in the letter: it's for you. I

hope you'll soon be well again. What's the matter with you? Have you caught a cold? Are you coming to Vienna before you go to America? Mitzi is still as cross as ever with me, and turns her head away, and turns up her nose—the silly goose. She is merely jealous because she's in love with you herself. What a little hussy! She's barely thirteen, and already running after men! If only you were back here.

Good-bye, dear Hartl, don't forget me, and write to me at once.

Many, many, many kisses from,

Your own true,

ROSL STOLLHOF.

P.S.—Your people don't know that you have written to me. Lots more kisses—write to me again.

Hartl folded up the letter, and remained lost in thought for a moment. The leaves of the pressed forget-me-not lay scattered on the envelope. He could not make out why Mr. Chiesi did not write to him. The troupe must have been in New York for a fortnight. Even if Mr. Chiesi had not sent him a message before he left, news from America could have arrived by now. Hartl knew that the troupe had arrived in New York a week before its first engagement. If he wrote at once to Mr. Chiesi, his letter would certainly catch him in New York.

At Hartl's request the nurse brought paper, pen, and ink, and half an hour later he asked her to post his letter.

Hartl's only friend was his dog, Puppy. Making an exception to his rule, the professor allowed the faithful beast to spend every afternoon with his master. These were the poor boy's happiest hours. The fox-terrier was very clever, and understood every word. It lay in Hartl's arms, pricked up its ears, listened to his whispered endearment, nestled up against him and often flashed its tongue over its sick master's cheeks. Puppy spent his melancholy mornings and nights in the Matron's room.

A month later Hartl, leaning on a stick, was in the secretary's office. The ill-tempered individual with a fierce moustache was saying to him:

"I know nothing of any money left for you. Your

manager contributed something towards the expenses of the hospital. Here is the account and there is the receipt. You are entitled to seventy-eight lei and thirty bani, will you please sign?"

Hartl looked about in desperation. He still felt very weak. The professor had advised him to stay a few weeks longer and told him there would be nothing to pay, but the boy had had enough of hospital. He wanted to get away to some quiet retreat where he could put in a little training, and convalesce. It was no use going back to the troupe. A few days before the professor had told him the bitter truth: he would never be fit for acrobatics, and his days in that profession were over.

To Hartl's question whether he had told Herr Chiesi of this, the professor replied that he had told the manager the real truth before the troupe left, for the fact was plain enough immediately after the operation.

Now Hartl guessed why Mr. Chiesi had not written to him.

"But Herr Chiesi told me definitely that he had given the secretary five hundred tei for me."

"I don't know what your manager told you, but he left nothing for you here. Sign, please, I have no more time to waste!"

Hartl signed the two receipts put before him. On one of them, which was written in Rumanian, he acknowledged that he had received five hundred tei which had been left for him by Herr Giovani Chiesi.

As he did not know Rumanian, and had not the slightest suspicion that he was being foully swindled, he quietly wrote his signature under the writing. On the second receipt he acknowledged the receipt of the balance of seventy-eight tei and thirty bani. In this case the sum was given in figures. He was now given back his gold watch and chain, and a few personal belongings which, on his admittance to hospital had been put in the suit now produced from the lockers.

The secretary, a notorious gambler, had suppressed all letters from Hartl to Chiesi, and Chiesi to Hartl.

In the Callea Victoria, the quarter in which the troupe had lodged, he called on Frau Triller, the lodging-house keeper, who received him in considerable confusion. She affected great delight on seeing him again, but roused him

to fury when she told him that his trunk, which she had been compelled to put into a front room, had been broken open and most of his belongings stolen. He had only been left two old pairs of tights. What Frau Triller did not say was that her own son was the thief.

Hartl sold his watch and chain at a jeweller's and got a second-hand dealer to give him three lei for the broken trunk; with the sum received from the hospital and the proceeds of his watch, chain and trunk, Hartl made his way to the station and took a ticket for Tuin-severin on the Hungarian frontier, his intention was to make his way from there to Budapest by one of the Danube steamers. In the Hungarian capital he hoped to find out where Wallenta's "Dog and Monkey Show" were exhibiting. Schorschl, his old friend and colleague in the Thima Troupe, had got a job in this enterprise and, some long time before, had written to Hartl suggesting that he should join them so that they could do a good knock-about turn together, and make a pile of money in the biggest variety shows on earth.

On the steamer Hartl and his dog kept entirely to themselves. He practised standing on his hands, and juggling with three long-necked wine flasks, and taught Puppy to run about on his fore-legs and hind-legs, to stand up, waltz round in circles, and to perform a large number of other tricks.

Hartl had put too great a strain on himself. He had to break his journey at Duna-Földvar. He felt ill and miserable. He took refuge at an inn in the Kiràly-Utca, spent a month in bed there, and got through most of his money. He sold the little handbag for a gulden, bought a knapsack and decided to make his way to Budapest on foot, earning his keep by giving performances in the taverns.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DIRECTOR Oscar Hammerstein was engaged in a long conversation with Mr. Chiesi in the office of Koster and Bials, Vaudeville Theatre.

"No, no, Mr. Chiesi," said Hammerstein placidly, looking at the wrapper of his cigar, "No no, Mr. Chiesi, this is

not the same turn. The Flier is not half so good as the little chap you had with you when you were here two years ago. You've nothing like the same success now."

Mr. Chiesi gazed wrathfully at the thick-set man with the peculiarly shaped tall hat on his grey head.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Hammerstein? Are you saying that the work's not good enough now?" Chiesi's black eyes flashed at the manager.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Chiesi, but the turn isn't as good as it was, and I'd rather you stayed only two weeks more. I've spoken to Albö, of Proctor's, and he would be very glad if you could go there earlier. When you've finished your tour through the U.S.A., my house will be at your disposal for another fortnight."

"Thank you, Mr. Hammerstein. We'll leave here a fortnight earlier, but I must decline a later engagement."

"Just as you please, Mr. Chiesi."

On Saturday night the "Flying Devils" packed up, and at nine o'clock next morning they left New York City on their journey westwards. They were due in Pittsburg on the Monday.

The "Twentieth Century, Limited," thundered along into daybreak at sixty miles an hour. The Pullman cars were all full, and the occupants of the uncomfortable seats in the ordinary coaches writhed in their endeavours to ease their cramped limbs.

Chiesi wore a gloomy air. He had not spoken for days. Hammerstein's words had wounded his professional pride. To think that Hartl's accident should affect him, too! Why had the boy stopped writing? What had happened in Bucarest? He had certainly hoped that Hartl would completely recover, though the professor had told him otherwise. If the lad was really not coming back, he must get hold of somebody else. The present one was no good; he had not Hartl's life, fire and graceful agility. He would write to-morrow to Paris and Ravenna and get them to find some youngsters and send them out to him. He simply *must* succeed in discovering another Hartl. For three days the rain had been streaming down. The waters of the Alleghany River were high. Tremendous floods poured down from the mountains. The foaming waters tore deep gaps in their banks, swept over them, and flooded huge areas, carrying away everything in their

path. Barns, houses, animals, trees and bushes swept downstream, to the great peril of all the bridges. Mountains of timber collected round the piers, exerting enormous force against their supports.

Pittsburg's great railway bridge mocked at all danger. On the upper reaches of the river the accumulated timber had already carried away three bridges, but these were no danger for the railway bridge, because it was not supported by piers in the water, but crossed from one bank to the other in one span.

The water-level rose from hour to hour. Under the railway bridge it had overflown its banks and was lapping the very edge of the ravine.

The railway authorities at Lancaster and Harrisburg rang up Pittsburg and asked whether trains coming from the east could cross the bridge. There was no danger for this bridge because its foundations and suspension-cables did not come in contact with the water.

The Lord of the Waters exulted greatly when the wind passed on the news that Man under-estimated his strength. He sent a few enormous tree-trunks to the rocks under the bridge, a huge pile accumulated there, and two tree tops broke a piece of rock, weighing several tons, out of the supporting wall. Of the individuals who witnessed the scene from the footpath beside the bridge not one observed the flood's treachery, as hundreds of trees concealed the breach. Tree trunks bored their way into the Achilles Heel of the foundation, undermined the anchoring of the northern cable, and tore fresh wounds in the granite frame.

The signal above the signal-box on the bridge gave free passage to the "Twentieth Century, Limited" Express.

The rails began to jingle. A distant whistling could be heard giving warning to all vehicles and persons approaching the level crossings. Then the great bell on the boiler of the engine became more and more audible. The train came round the corner and slowed down slightly in accordance with regulations.

Down below raged the flood, thrusting more and more tree trunks into the wound in the rocky wall, increasing the gap with every second, and finally forcing the anchoring out of the holds.

The curtains were drawn in the windows of the Pullman

cars and the lamps in the coaches darkened with blue shades. Most of the passengers were taking little notice of the coming day. Tired out, they were either asleep or sitting hunched up in their places.

The spectators on the footpath looked curiously at the approaching train.

A few of the more nervous ones ran to the bank.

The giant locomotive thundered on to the bridge, rumbled over the rails towards the opposite bank, but before it arrived there the flood forced its way into the breach in the foundations. The pressure from above, the might of the foaming waters below, and Neptune's malice, made a mockery of Man's constructional genius.

Before the engine reached the opposite bank the right cable gave way. The bridge, weighed down on one side by the thousand tons of trainload, tilted and swayed; the engine left the rails, and tore its way through the bridge. Unearthly shrieks rent the air. The whole thing slipped sideways, and with an enormous roar, bridge and train crashed into the depths.

It was the work of seconds.

The spectators on the bridge shared the fate of the rest.

The foaming waters closed over the shattered train and the unfortunates trapped within it. Almost all of them were drowned in the Alleghany River.

The "Flying Devils" had found their grave.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"HAVEN'T you any idea what it means to love so much and suffer such a lot ?"

Rosl Stollhof threw herself down in the corner of the sofa and rammed both fists in her eyes; a sob shook her whole body.

Frau Gürtler, pale as death, sat by the fire and stared hard at the weeping girl. Her sorrow was mingled with astonishment. Was this the dear little Rosl she had known since her birth and who had grown up with her own children ?

Emilie and Rosa stood by their mother. Rosl's behaviour horrified them too.

Mitzi stood by the window and gnawed nervously at her handkerchief. Her face was deathly white and stood out sharply against her red-gold hair.

"Are you going to speak or not? Are you going to tell us what you've heard from Hartl?"

Frau Stollhof strode up to her daughter and shook her fist at her.

"Don't hit Rosl, Frau Stollhof; you won't get any further that way."

Old Gürtler drew the enraged mother from the sofa.

"She shall speak, or . . . !" Frau Stollhof seized Rosl by her hair and smacked her face hard.

"Don't beat me! D'you think you can beat the love out of me with blows? I love Hartl and he loves me, and I'll die if he doesn't come back."

"You little hussy! Fifteen years old and talkin' about love and dyin'. Just you tell us what you know. How d'you know Hartl wasn't killed in the railway accident? It was actually in the papers!"

Rosl wiped her eyes and said in a voice broken with sobs:

"Because Hartl wasn't with Herr Chiesi at all. Three weeks ago he was in hospital in Bucharest and he wrote me from there."

"What, he's written to you and not to me, his mother? Why on earth didn't you tell us when you've seen us all so grieved and in such a state?"

"'Hartl's begged me not to tell his people that he's ill."

'My God, Rosl, what a way to talk! What's happened to the lad? Was he very ill?"

"I don't know; he wrote to tell me that it was all over between us if I said a word."

"So you're carryin' on, are you? Can't you stop snivellin', you shameless young hussy?"

"You won't get anything out o' me by kicks and cursing. Don't you know what it means to love anyone so much that you just can't live without him? What d'you know about me anyway? When I was five I had to work and I've gone on working ever since. I belong to Hartl and Hartl belongs to me!"

Frau Stollhof's hands descended once more on the girl's face until Gürtler pulled her back and held her fast.

"I'll knock the love out of you: just you wait a bit!"

"Rosl, child," Frau Gürtler sat down by the weeping girl. "I'm thinking of your happiness; I don't mind if you love Hartl and he loves you, but you're still children and you must be sensible. The whole thing at the moment is: where's the boy? Why didn't you tell me, his mother, that he's in hospital? Even if he told you not to, you ought to have told me."

"I shall do what Hartl tells me; he asked me not to tell anybody."

"But where is he now?"

"I don't know. My letter came back more than a fortnight ago. It was written on the back that Richardl Gürtler had recovered and left hospital three weeks before."

Rosl began crying again.

"Oh, God! oh, God!" she cried, "where's my Hartl, my Hartl?"

"I'll give you *my Hartl!*" Her mother rushed at her again, but Frau Gürtler took the weeping girl in her arms.

"Don't beat Rosl. She doesn't mean any harm."

"But she's wicked; she's wicked; and he isn't her Hartl!"

Mitzi stood with flaming cheeks by the sofa, trembling in every limb.

"Oh, Mitzel!" Father Gürtler tried to pull away the little girl, but she broke loose, rushed up to the sofa, and put out her tongue at Rosl.

"She ought to be ashamed of herself; he isn't her Hartl. She was always kissing him by the Danube, but he never kissed her!"

Rosl freed herself from Frau Gürtler's arms.

"She's jealous of me, silly little schoolgirl, because she was madly keen on Hartl. She was always sneaking after us down by the river. She ought to be getting on with lessons, instead of running after men at her age!"

"You're a fibber! You're a fibber!" Mitzi burst into tears, and ran to the bedroom.

"Come back home, and we'll see what's to be done. I'll knock the love out of you."

"Look here, mother, why should you make fun of me and beat me? What have I done wrong? Because I love Hartl? You can't knock my love for Hartl out of me. Mother, if I don't get my Hartl, I shall die!"

For several weeks the Gürtlers had been worrying because the post-cards came not from Hartl, but from Mr. Chiesi, who always sent Hartl's love. All their letters and questions had been answered, not by Hartl, but by Mr. Chiesi, who informed them that some new tricks were being rehearsed, and their boy was too tired to write.

Gürtler was always trying to cheer up his wife, who was very worried about her son, and often saw him as a cripple in her dreams. The father, who rather fancied himself on his knowledge of men, explained that Mr. Chiesi was a decent fellow, for the sixty gulden he had sent had arrived only a few days before.

To-day, Frau Grafl, the Gürtlers' neighbour, appeared with a newspaper, and showed them a cable from New York, reporting the terrible railway disaster at Pittsburg. It gave the names of some of the victims, and also stated that the members of the world-famous acrobatic troupe, "The Flying Devils", had lost their lives in the catastrophe.

On hearing the shrieks of Mother Gürtler, who was frightened out of her life, the neighbours poured in, among them, Rosl Stullhof. At first, the girl also thought that her darling was dead. She began to cry and wail piteously for Hartl.

Frau Stollhof and the others were astonished at Rosl's behaviour, but the child went on repeating:

"My Hartl; oh, my Hartl!"

She gradually calmed down, and began to think things out. At last she realized that he could not possibly be in America, judging by everything she knew through her correspondence with him. He had said he meant to pass through Vienna, and if he were on his way to rejoin the troupe, she would certainly have heard from him.

"It isn't true. Hartl had left Herr Chiesi!"

Here the whole story of the illness and the letters between Rosl and Hartl came out.

In the night they had to send for the doctor to see Rosl. She was feverish, rambled in delirium, and kept calling out for her Hartl.

Dr. Rosenthal ordered ice-packs, gave the patient a few drops which soothed her somewhat, and ordered that nothing should be allowed to excite her. He could not

say for certain what the trouble was, but he hoped that it did not mean inflammation of the brain.

When he visited the First House the following morning Rosl was a good deal calmer, but her temperature was still 38.6.

There was another patient in the house, for Mitzi, too, was in bed with a high temperature and flaming scarlet cheeks.

Gürtler told the doctor of the events of the previous day.

"These tender children's hearts are like the frailest Chinese porcelain," said the doctor; "one must handle them very carefully. No rough treatment, or else hearts are broken. Girls of this age don't often fall in love to this degree, but when they do there is danger ahead. Only kindness and sympathy can do any good here; medicine is of little use."

After an interval of years, Loisi reappeared in the Seven Houses for the first time. Milli had run over to her, and asked her to come at once, as her mother could not take the responsibility for Mitzi. Emilie explained what had happened. Loisi's heart was heavy with fear.

When darkness came on, she took a cab and went over to Brigittenau.

She sat back in the seat, her hands working convulsively.

"Poor Mitzi, poor Mitzi!" she whispered. "Has it taken you as early as this? You're a Stiegler, passionate and impulsive. Poor child, may the good God in Heaven save you from all the misery an unhappy love brings a girl."

Frau Gürtler sat by Mitzi's bed, putting ice-packs round the hot brows of the little patient. When Loisi entered the bedroom, Mitzi began to cry:

"Don't be cross with me for being ill, Auntie Loisi. I'll be up again to-morrow and go to school."

"But why should I be cross with you, child? The main thing is that you should be all right again to-morrow, so that we can take Herr Schwartzl and go home; p'raps Uncle Höllriegel will take you with him to Abbazia. He is going away for a few weeks the day after to-morrow."

"Auntie Loisi, please, please, let me stay with Auntie Gürtler; don't take me away!"

"But why not, precious?"

"Oh, do let me stay, Auntie Loisi."

"All right, if you want to."

"Thank you ever so much, Auntie. Don't you see, if I go away with you, or with Herr Höllriegel, I shan't be here when a letter from Hartl comes."

Frau Gürtler and Loisi exchanged a significant glance.

"All right, stay here; I can come over any evening at a moment's notice, and when you're quite better we'll have another picnic in the Wienerwald."

"All right, Auntie Loisi."

Outside in the parlour, Frau Gürtler asked:

"What do you think of that?"

"Don't take any notice, dear Frau Gürtler. Mitzi is so pure and innocent in heart and mind that her love for Hartl couldn't be anything else."

Mother Gürtler nodded. She could not exactly see into the soul of this twelve-year-old girl, but a fine and sensitive chord was struck in her heart, and her thoughts went back to the days of her own first love. What right had she, on the strength of age, to judge poor little Mitzi? She was fifteen when she first met Gürtler, and sixteen when she married him.

Loisi Kreitmeier sat down with Frau Gürtler on the sofa.

"Frau Gürtler, when Herr Gürtler comes home, will you be kind enough to ask him if he'll give me away?"

"What's this, Loisi? Have you come to your senses at last?"

"Things can't go on as they are. Höllriegel says the step must be taken. His relations have twice already set the police on us. You know I'm still on the register.* I don't come off until I marry. But I don't have to turn up for examination as long as I'm living with him; he arranged that with the inspector, who's a friend of his. The latest is that his people are trying to get him put away in the asylum. Three doctors have said that he ought to be put under restraint if he goes on living with me. He still thinks I don't love him. But I tell you, Frau Gürtler, that I couldn't live without him now!"

Loisi dried her tears.

*Of licensed "professionals". [Tr.]

"Yesterday we applied for a marriage licence, without saying a word to anyone. Höllriegel is going to Abbazia for three weeks with a well-known professor and his family doctor. The professor will, meanwhile, keep him under observation and then give his report if his relatives put him in an asylum."

"You can't think, dear Loisi, what a treat it is to hear that you've given way at last. Once you're married, the whole bunch of relatives can go hang. My husband will be only too pleased to give you away."

"God bless you, Frau Gürtler, and I'll come back again for a bit to-morrow night. I'd like to come in the daytime, but—you know—the Seven Houses' people——"

Rosl Stollhof's condition became so much worse that the poor child had to be taken to the General Hospital.

The news that Hartl Gürtler, pride of the Seven Houses, had perished in the railway accident, spread with the greatest rapidity. Nothing would convince Frau Grafl that Hartl was not dead. She always carried a newspaper about with her and showed the front page to all inquirers, with the remark:

"You can see for yourself. Look at the picture! The eye-witness of the *Illustrierter Wiener Extrablatt* drew it; he must have seen it himself, or else they wouldn't say he's an eye-witness. Look at the train breaking through the bridge; you can see the people tumbling out of the windows. Look at that chap falling head-first; he's just like Hartl, and got the same sort of suit he used to wear here."

Many friends came to express their sympathy, and most of them were quite upset when they heard Hartl was not really dead.

In the great ward of Professor Krafft-Ebing's section lay a young girl, kept down in bed by towels secured to the frame, and with ice-packs round her head. With wild staring eyes she kept on calling out:

"Give me my Hartl, give me my Hartl!"

Then she would lie still for a moment and her lips would move in a whisper:

"Do you still love me, Hartl? Do you still love me? Come, put your arm round my neck an' give me a kiss."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HARTL had fallen upon difficult and anxious times. He roamed from village to village, and town to town, in constant terror of being stopped by some gendarme and asked for his permit. He was still under age, and therefore exposed to the risk of being sent back to Vienna by the police.

At Duna-Földvar he had received a letter from Schorsch, telling him that his friend would wait for him in Liège. They would then work out an imitation of the comic "Nigger Grotesques" turn—which Hartl must surely know—and thereafter seek engagements. He, Schorsch, was now a clown in Wallenta's Circus, but receiving a very small wage, so small that he could only buy the barest necessities. Hartl must, therefore, bring a few hundred marks, as they would require their own "props", a nigger-village curtain, and must advertise in the *Artist*, and procure photographs and illustrated letter-paper, as well as order posters in five colours from Friedländer, in Hamburg. His friend added that he had already made the sketches himself. One thing was certain: they *must* make their debut in a first-class music-hall in Berlin or Paris. They could prepare their act while they were with Wallenta. Schorsch would not think of taking less than three thousand marks a month.

"There's only one thing for me now, working and saving," said Hartl to himself.

When he felt a little stronger, he put on his tights in his lodgings one evening, flung his cloak over them, took his bottles and balls in his knapsack, and crept through the streets of Duna-Földvar, followed by Puppy. With much trepidation, he entered a tavern, walked up to the landlord, and asked him for permission to give a performance.

He had thought out a systematic programme. He proposed to begin by standing on his hands on a chair; then he would juggle, first with the balls and afterwards with the bottles. The bottle trick would be accompanied by the song of the "Merry Smith", and as each bottle came to hand he would beat time with it on the floor. Next he would run about on his hands and, by way of grand

finale, he would stand on one hand, while Puppy danced on his hind legs. His encore was a Viennese song, while Puppy did a double somersault.

The landlord stared in amazement at the pale youth standing before him, throwing back his cloak to show his tights, while Puppy sat up and begged.

"*Igen fiu*, you can show what you can do! *Tessek kerem baratom.*" He thrust an old man aside.

Hartl began by singing. He had considered the point well. It was best to begin with a song, as singing was the quickest way of attracting the attention of the customers.

Those present turned round to look at the singing boy in tights. In a chair at his side sat a white fox-terrier, begging with its front paws. Hartl sang an old soldier's song, dating from the Rodetzky times:

"I war einmaa Rekrut,
Meine Zeit, die ist jetzt aus,
Drum geh i voller Freuden
Zu meiner Mutter z' Haus—
Oder was?
Drum geh i voller Freuden
Zu meiner Mutter z' Hans."

There were few present who knew German, but the word "Rekrut" was enough to call forth a volley of applause.

Hartl went through his programme, and the applause increased as he proceeded.

After Puppy had turned her somersaults, Hartl took a plate and went from table to table. He had almost forgotten this part of the performance, and was almost overwhelmed with shame, though he managed to keep back his tears. He thought of the letter from Schorsch, who was waiting for him at Liège. He also thought of his home, and reflected that he must make himself a big man to win back the respect of his people.

His first takings amounted to thirty-three kreuzer and a roll. Hartl spat on the coins, with a prayer to increase and multiply and bring him luck. The landlord ordered a *gulasch* and a glass of wine for the performer, and gave him an additional five kreuzer.

Hartl visited two other taverns in the town and then went home feeling too tired for more. He had not completely recovered and must husband his strength.

The proceeds of the first evening amounted to almost a gulden.

Hartl stayed two days longer in the town and then resumed his wanderings with Puppy. He gave performances in every village, begged food, and often a night's lodging for Puppy and himself, and he saved every kreuzer it was not absolutely essential to spend.

He often had to work for very meagre rewards; the uncouth, stingy peasants would laugh at him and spit in his plate. On these occasions he set his teeth and passed to the next table.

In twelve days Hartl reached Budapest. He read on a poster that an acrobatic troupe which he had met was working in "Herzmann's Orpheum". He brushed up his clothes and polished his boots and was at the stage-door by seven o'clock.

"Hello, Hartl! Aren't you dead? Isn't it your ghost I'm looking at?"

"Not quite as bad as that. I'm quite well again now."

"But how've you got back so soon, young feller? There must be something wrong somewhere. Are the Chief and the others dead?"

"What d'you mean? What Chief? I don't understand you, Hermann!"

"Aren't you with Chiesi still? Look here! don't you know what happened?"

"No; I've heard nothing. I haven't been with the 'Devils' for months. What's happened? Out with it, Hermann!"

"Good Lord! Don't you ever read the papers! The whole troupe went bang in the great railway accident in America."

Hartl had to lean against the doorpost for support; his whole frame trembled, and his legs seemed to be giving way under him. His teeth chattered audibly.

"Stop fooling, Hermann. What's happened?"

"If you don't believe me, come into the dressing-room. My chief and the others'll confirm it. It was in the *Artist* as well."

Hartl lay in bed in his little room in the Üllöipt, in the Ninth District of Budapest. He was shivering with fever. On the coverlet was the latest number of the *Artist*.

The boy flung himself restlessly from side to side. Mr. Chiesi, Willi, Fred, and the new boy, Francesco—all dead! The paper stated that they had all perished in the railway accident. A terrible feeling of loneliness stole over Hartl. Mr. Chiesi had been a second father to him. Although there was no possibility of working in the troupe again, Hartl had never given up hope that Mr. Chiesi would help him to start again. But now everything was over.

Hartl read the report over and over again. If he had not had his accident in Bucharest, he would now be lying on the bed of the Alleghany River. It must have been pre-ordained.

In a state of hopeless dejection he let the paper fall. It meant he must continue his wanderings and with his one-man show earn the money needed to produce the nigger act.

There was little to be earned in the restaurants of Budapest's suburbs. Very few of the proprietors allowed him to perform.

A letter to the place where Rosl was working went by the next post. Hartl asked her to tell his people that he had left Chiesi, the troupe had perished in the railway accident, and he must look after his future alone. When he'd got something certain, he would write to his people himself, and also send money for their support. He was now going abroad and would send his address when he arrived.

The letter never reached Rosl. An inquisitive office-girl hankered after the Hungarian stamp. She knew that Rosl was in hospital, carefully removed the stamp from the envelope, and tore up the letter without reading it.

Hartl made a detour round Vienna and reached the lower Austrian border via Komorn, Raab, and Ödenburg. He was twice stopped by gendarmes, and released only after earnest pleading. From Neustadt, in the Burgenland, he wandered from village to village to St. Pölten. It was lovely summer weather, and Puppy often ran two or three times up and down the road, barking joyously, and never going too far from her master. If she disappeared round a corner she always turned back at once to see if he were following her.

His journey through the Wienerwald made Hartl homesick, and he exchanged the cheerful ditties, with which he had hitherto enlivened his wanderings, for the "Waselbua", the "Erste Schnee", and other lugubrious fragments which brought the tears to his eyes.

Of Rosl he seldom thought. He liked the girl's kisses and was a good comrade, but he did not yet know what true love meant. He thought that his innocent association with Rosl was what was usually called love. He regarded the descriptions of this emotion by poets and writers as exaggerated; their sort of love was most probably only to be found in books. In real life it only meant that one exchanged a few kisses and never stopped talking about them, and always said "yes" when the beloved asked whether one still loved her.

The Austrian peasants were even more close-fisted than the Hungarian. There were few kreuzer to be picked up hereabouts. But Hartl kept to the larger villages, with several inns, and often gave his performance six or seven times in an evening. Thus his gains increased.

The Thima Troupe was on a visit to Weinzierl, the suburb of Krems, on the Danube. Hartl's heart ached when he gazed from afar on the scene of his first professional appearances. More than eight years had passed. How much had happened in that time! What happy times he had known in the years in between! And here he was on the threshold of the arena just as poor as before.

The mast for the "Giant Leap" towered to the sky. In those days the mast had seemed really thirty metres high. Now his eyes were open and, notwithstanding all his trouble, there was a smile on his lips as he remembered how the manager, kneeling on the stage in prayer, had criticized and abused the audience and its stinginess.

In Melk a fair was in progress, and Hartl did very well. Everyone was happy and generous, and even a policeman who, to Hartl's terror, entered an inn during his performance turned out to be most amiable and did not interfere. Hartl counted over his savings every evening before going to bed, while Puppy lay on a chair beside him, evincing an intelligent interest in the proceedings.

The amount increased but slowly. He had bought a pair of secondhand boots and had his old pair soled and

heeled. He also needed fresh underwear, and all this made a big hole in his slender purse.

Hartl travelled farther and farther from his native town. He passed through Upper Austria, Salzburg, and the Tyrol without difficulty, but he had hardly crossed the Swiss frontier before a policeman arrested him.

The frontier police-station was in the customs building. It was a despairing Hartl who sat by the window waiting until the formalities were settled and a policeman came to hand him over to the Austrian gendarmerie. Prayers and entreaties availed nothing. His face was white with terror, he would rather die than be sent back to Vienna.

A guardian angel must have taken an oath at Hartl's cradle to save the boy in any emergency on his way through life.

There was suddenly a fearful hubbub outside the customs-house. A drunken driver had started a quarrel with the officials, which ended in a free fight between the frontier and customs' police on one side, and a number of drivers on the other.

The official on duty jumped up, snatched his cap and sword, and ran to the door. Hartl thought for a fraction of a second, then picked up his knapsack, which had been taken from him, and his birth certificate, which lay on the desk, and jumped out of the window. He slunk across the yard, climbed a fence, and jumped on a cart, which was going the way he had come.

The police official who had cross-examined Hartl was unfortunate in the free fight outside the office. He received a violent blow with a whip-handle on the back of his head which made him unconscious for several hours.

At Rorschach, Hartl went on board one of the Lake Constance steamers, and at Lindau he touched German ground again. He had had enough of Switzerland.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AFTER her release from the hospital, Rosl, a thin Rosl, much wasted by illness, worked in a lamp-factory. She did overtime whenever she had a chance, and also took fancy-work home. She never slept an hour more than was absolutely necessary.

There was but one thought in the girl's mind. She would work her hands to the bone and save, save, save. In a year or two she would have enough money to go and find Hartl, if he had not come back to Vienna meanwhile.

At home, the girl had to put up with a good deal from her invalid mother. Cancer was eating its way into Frau Stollhof's vitals, and the poor woman was tortured by horrible headaches. She attributed her sufferings to the sorrow Rosl caused her.

The young girl bore everything with dumb patience. She was waiting for her hour, and met fresh approaches from young men with an emphatic negative.

She never went to the Gürtlers now. This was for the sake of Mitzi who, after her recovery, had pleaded fervently that Rosl should not be allowed at the house.

Rosl had stayed away from the Gürtlers on her own account, and if her mother had not been ill she would have gone to live somewhere else.

Frau Gürtler often came to see Rosl in the evening, and saved her from blows and abuse. Hartl's mother was weighed down with sorrow and anxiety. She had a bad heart herself, and had to look on helpless while her husband's health became worse from day to day. He was inconsolable about his boy. Although he had not forgotten Ignaz, of whom nothing had been heard or seen for ten years, it was Hartl's latest disappearance that rankled and was bringing him to the grave. Some trouble in his throat, which the old doctor diagnosed too late as tuberculosis of the larynx, gave him a lot of pain and made his condition worse from day to day, as he no longer had the will to live. He refused to take any medicine, and even in the worst weather would walk for hours by the Danube Canal, murmuring poetry. One of his daughters always followed him secretly at a distance, as they were afraid he might commit suicide.

Father Gürtler himself often called on Rosl at night. He was always asking her whether she had any news of Hartl. His eyes rested inquiringly on the girl. Although she was honest and decent, the thought was always occurring to him that a secret fire was burning within this child, and she might one day prove Hartl's ruin. His wife, whom he told of this suspicion, laughed at what she called

his silly fears, although she was too often oppressed by a feeling that a second Rosl lurked behind the first.

"What an idea! In the first place Rosl is still a child, and who knows whether some man won't come along some day and take her thoughts off our boy. You've read her letter from Hartl. There is not a word about love in it, although he sends her a kiss or two at the end. Hartl hasn't any idea what love is."

Rosl was overjoyed when her darling's parents came to see her, not only because in their presence her mother controlled herself, but because she regarded these visits as an acknowledgement that she was one of the family.

She never for one moment believed that Hartl was dead. She knew, she had an intuition that he was alive, and that a day would come which would bring him back to her. For although she was not yet sixteen, she felt much older, and her illness had matured her. Frau Gürtler brought Rosl strength-giving soups; she saw that the girl was starving herself, and that her invalid mother's cooking had neither nourishment nor taste. There was another burden she had to carry: Mitzi, little Mitzi, showed all the signs of melancholia. With tears in her eyes, she had once confessed to Frau Gürtler that she loved Hartl terribly, and would die if he took Rosl. She would rather Hartl died himself.

The ceremony of Loisi's marriage to Herr Höllriegel had been celebrated a few days before by the provost, Frau Gürtler's brother.

Only the Gürtlers, a friend of the bridegroom, and little Mitzi were present.

The venerable gentleman spoke a few simple words, and the sound of bells wafted into the church and mingled with the strains of the organ. Mitzi, in a white dress, stood in a day-dream behind the bride. The picture in front of her underwent a transformation, and she saw herself kneeling at the altar at Hartl's side while the provost put her hand in his and joined their lives for ever.

"What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

On the day after his engagement Herr Höllriegel had a long talk with his friend, the inspector, and, whether

it was due to good spirits or goblins, the fact remains that in the file of the police of Vienna, there was not a document or scrap of paper or single word that Frau Aloisia Höllriegel *neé* Kreitmeier had ever left the narrow path for so much as an hour. On the day after the wedding, Maxl Gürtler had to take to his bed. He shivered violently and was hardly able to make himself heard owing to the hoarseness which was the effect of tuberculosis on his vocal chords.

Mitzi ran to the Brigitta church every day and offered up fervent prayers to God to keep Hartl safe and sound.

Two children prayed and tortured themselves for a young boy, whose restlessness had brought sorrow unspeakable on his own folk.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AT the "Herberge zur Heimat" in the little agricultural town of Altenstein au der Nagold, Hartl was joined by a journeyman.

During his wanderings, tramping journeymen had often tried to join up with him, but after a short time he had always got rid of them, either by taking some side-road or by putting forward the excuse that he had left something behind in the last village, and must go and fetch it. Sometimes these fellows got very furious with him, but after a few well-aimed "rights" they left the solid young man alone.

Hartl also took good care not to beg or to ask for work or food. He very seldom put up for the night at lodging-houses, but preferred to pay a few groschen at small inns to avoid meeting tramps.

Such places were often raided by the police or gendarmerie, and Hartl wished to give the latter the widest possible berth.

The tailor's assistant, Podworzick, contrary to all the traditions of the knights of needle and scissors, was a young giant. He attached more importance to begging than to work. In Hartl he suspected he had a source of supply, and therefore joined him when he crossed the Nagold on his journey northwards early in the morning.

Hartl had already saved more than one hundred fifty marks, which he kept under his shirt in a small leather purse hung from a string round his neck.

Podworzick had discovered this hiding-place when Hartl was washing the previous evening. The Pole suspected the young man of possessing great riches, and decided to secure the money—by force, if necessary.

For days Hartl's conscience had been pricking him. He was always catching himself thinking of his mother and father. Suppose they were torturing themselves over the lack of news of him? Oughtn't he to have written? How different things would be when his comic turn with Schorsch came off! Why had not Mr. Chiesi really left the five hundred lei for him with the secretary of the hospital at Budapest? If he had, he, Hartl, would have been able to go by train to join Schorsch; the comic act would probably have been ready by now, and they could have taken engagements.

Hartl strode forward. Ahead of him ran Puppy, chasing birds and beetles which fled from her in terror. Suddenly Hartl came across a hedgehog; the prickly beast was in a great hurry. The young man walked slower, and then came to a stop. The hedgehog did the same. It thrust forward its nose and surveyed the legs of its neighbour. When Hartl moved off the hedgehog followed. Then Puppy came back and stood facing the hedgehog, which immediately rolled itself up into a ball in extreme bewilderment. The dog looked at the prickly ball with great interest, smelt it well, pricked her nose, and jumped back in terror.

Meanwhile, Podworzick had appeared on the scene. He raised his stick and was about to bring it down on the hedgehog when Hartl sprang forward and caught his arm. The Pole laughed:

"Kill the thing! It's a horrible beast."

Puppy thought her master in danger, and snapped at the man's leg.

At midday Hartl stopped for a rest at a village inn and ordered a snack. The Pole had gone on ahead. Hartl found a neswpaper on the table, and read it. Reports of accidents in all parts of the earth were given in large letters on the front page. Hartl was seized with a great terror. Suppose his parents, or some relative or acquaintance, had read the news of the Pittsburg railway disaster!

The names of the victims would certainly not be given, and his parents would be crazy with fear, and give him up for lost.

Quick as thought, Hartl drew paper and pencil from his pocket and wrote:

> DEAR PARENTS,
>
> Don't worry about me, I am quite all right. I am not with Herr Chiesi now. When I am in work again I'll write and tell you everything, and send you money as well. Don't worry about me.
>
> Love and kisses to all.—Your HARTL.

At the village store he bought an envelope and a stamp, slipped a five-mark note in the envelope, and posted the letter.

As Hartl left the village he saw the Polish tailor climb out of the ditch and follow in his tracks. The boy grew very suspicious, and decided to keep a sharp look-out.

Hour after hour they tramped along the lonely road; not a village was to be seen; night came on, and Hartl's injured leg began to hurt him horribly. It was already dark when they reached a little village. The Pole began begging at a number of farms, and the door was shut in Hartl's face by an irate inn-keeper, whom he asked for a night's shelter. There was no other inn in the village, and no hostel for travelling journeymen.

There were heavy clouds in the sky, and Hartl decided to go on to the next village. He could see nothing of the Pole. The road was pitch-black, and Puppy kept very close to her master. Clenching his teeth, Hartl strode on. A gust of wind shook the trees which lined the road, and there was a ghostly rustling of leaves.

It was not the first night which had found Hartl alone on lonely roads, but never before had such ominous feelings possessed him.

Suddenly Puppy barked and turned round. Hartl turned round also and a few paces away saw a man walking bare-footed. The tailor came closer.

"Here, I've been following you. Why didn't you wait for me?"

"There was no reason why I should wait for you; I can find my way alone."

"But I want to go with you. I like you."

Hartl did not answer, but began to walk quickly. He tightened his hold on his stick, and kept careful watch on the movements of his companion, and the thick blackthorn in his hand.

Lights appeared in the distance. Hartl hastened on. The Pole was a little way behind, and the distance between them increased progressively. At a bend in the road, where Hartl lost the lights for a moment, he decided to run into the woods and let the Pole pass him. He jumped over the ditch and ran quickly through the bushes. He cautiously peeped between the trees to see whether the Pole was going by. Not a sound could be heard. The tailor must have abandoned his notion and made his bed in the grass. He must be just as tired as Hartl. After a time Hartl, taking care to make no noise, sought out a grassy spot among the trees and lay down with his bundle beside him. Puppy nestled up against him. The boy resolved to keep awake for fear the Pole should attack him.

Notwithstanding all his determination he was soon in a deep sleep. The strain of the long tramp had worn him out and he could not keep awake. Puppy, too, dreamed at his side, gasping audibly at intervals.

His old home and his school years came back before him. All the whackings promised him by the nurserymen were now duly administered in his sleep. Jakisch, Pschick, Poppenberger, Egolf, Zechmann, and Weichselbraun stood round him in a ring. They rushed at him, flourishing big sticks. The circle closed in upon him, and there was no way of escape. He tried to put up his hands to defend himself, but found he had no arms. His tormentors collected themselves for a final leap, and he suddenly heard the voice of his mother screaming out:

"Help! Maxl! Help! Our lad, Hartl, is in danger!"

His father jumped from a mound, calling out:

"Get back! Get back!"

Zechmann swung up his cudgel, when his father's voice rang out:

"Hartl!"

Hartl woke up in terror. Puppy, barking fiercely, disappeared in the darkness, while the Pole's blackthorn came down on Hartl's shoulder. But, before Podworzick could get in his second blow, Hartl was on his feet and closing with the tailor. Puppy got her teeth in his assailant's

leg and would not let go. When the Pole tried to catch hold of the dog, he seized his opportunity and snatched the stick out of his hand.

The little clearing became the scene of a life and death struggle. Podworzick was enormously strong. He was not thinking of robbery or Hartl's money any longer, for the lust of blood had possessed him. He tried to get his fingers round Hartl's neck. The boy defended himself vigorously with his fists, placing shrewd blows whenever he could. He pommelled his opponent's stomach, then suddenly stumbled over the roots of a tree and fell full length on the ground. The tailor immediately rushed at him. He got both hands round Hartl's neck, and pressed in his fingers until the boy almost lost consciousness.

During the fight, Puppy had buried her teeth deep in the Pole's leg, and torn off great lumps of flesh. She now ran, barking, round the combatants, seeking out the enemy's weak spots. She suddenly spied his bare feet, and in a trice was tugging at Podworzick's toes.

Hartl's strength was beginning to give out when the would-be murderer suddenly loosened his grip with a yell of pain. Hartl seized his chance. Putting in every ounce, he gave the Pole an upper-cut, wriggled from under him, and beat him with his fists until he lay almost senseless. Hartl's blows rained down on his face and stomach, while Puppy's sharp teeth almost tore his toes from his feet.

When the Pole was incapable of anything beyond dull groans, Hartl let go and called off Puppy. He ran back to the road.

A distant church clock struck eleven o'clock.

The struggle had lasted a quarter of an hour.

At a quarter to eleven Father Gürtler had breathed his last breath in far-away Vienna.

It was a quarter to eleven when Hartl had been roused by his father's cry from his horrible dream.

It was the soul of a dying man which had responded to the mother's dumb prayer, and saved the life of his child.

Hartl slung his knapsack round his shoulders and ran down the road. His feeling of tiredness had completely left him, but his breathing was fast and laboured. Suddenly his blood froze within him, there was a sound as of someone running. He stopped dead. The sound of steps could no

longer be heard. His eyes and ears strained through the darkness. The moon had torn the veil of clouds to shreds and cast a pale glimmer over the road. Nothing was to be seen, and silence reigned unchallenged.

Hartl ran on, with Puppy at his heels, tongue hanging out.

The echo of pursuing steps became audible again. All Hartl's senses were on edge. Who was following him, and where was the pursuer? Hartl stopped again and looked round. No sound could be heard, and nothing seen. Hartl was now thoroughly frightened and ran twice as fast. The invisible thing also doubled its pace. The terror-stricken boy seized his knapsack, pressed it to him, and raced down the road like one possessed. The pursuer's steps could no longer be heard.

Hartl thus discovered what it was that had sounded like human footsteps. While he was running the ends of the straps of his knapsack had been beating against the leather.

In the distance could be heard the sound of barking. Puppy proposed to reply, but her master told her to be quiet.

Hartl went on more slowly. He knew that the tailor could not be following him; Puppy's teeth had seen to that. The road curved again and the silhouette of a church tower, soaring Heavenwards, came into sight.

Hartl went along the low, long wall of a churchyard, and then he suddenly stopped, and Puppy began to whine softly.

Hartl's eyes bored through the darkness. What was that silvery-white thing moving in the moonlight? The dog, too, stared ahead and cowered at the feet of her master.

Two long arms, the arms of a giant, came out slowly from behind the churchyard wall and clutched at the darkness. A big head on a fat body followed. The ghostly form remained thus for a moment, and then passed behind the wall again.

Puppy yelped softly when the spook reappeared after a short interval. Hartl was stricken with terror and stood rooted to the ground.

The deathly silence was broken by the gentle rustling of leaves. The church clock began to boom. Hartl counted twelve.

White crosses in the cemetery seemed to be moving towards him. The trees bent down their heads and whispered softly. Gravestones, squatting like gnomes on their mounds, grew larger and larger. The tree-tops inclined towards the crosses and stones, and their leaves told them mysterious secrets.

Midnight. The ghosts' hour. Hosts of eerie ghost-stories came to mind. There were no ghosts. The straps of his knapsack had fooled him before, and the spooky thing in front was not going to frighten him now. He called Puppy, which was still cowering at his feet. He bravely strode forward along the cemetery wall, and the terrifying phantoms turned out to be a silver poplar, swaying in the wind.

Hartl hurried into the village and found an inn in which a light was still burning.

In answer to his inquiry, a maid told him that he could have a room. She scrutinized him carefully, and when he caught sight of himself in a mirror he shrank back in horror. One eye was bloodshot, and his forehead and lips were battered and bruised. Only now did he feel how much his limbs hurt him. With Puppy at his side, he stretched himself deliciously in bed, and shortly afterwards fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

In the Gürtlers' parlour two candles burned at the dead father's head.

His wife and children knelt round him and offered up prayers for the welfare of his soul.

The death-bell tolled in the tower of Brigittenau church, bidding Heaven above to prepare for the arrival of one more poor human soul.

The mother's prayer for her dead husband—with whom she had shared her joys and sorrows for six-and-thirty years—was followed by another to Holy Mary for her far-away, long-lost Hartl.

Roaring through the night over the steel rails, a train passed through Württemberg on its way eastwards.

A post-office van was brightly lighted. Two officials sorted the letters. One letter, which was written the day before, and would have made a dying man's passing easier, fell into the bag with the inscription "Vienna".

But Father Gürtler would not read it now.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THREE handfuls of yellow, clayey earth rattled down on Maxl Gürtler's coffin, lying at the bottom of the grave. His daughters supported their mother and drew her tottering away.

Each of the mourners followed the family's example, and the earth fell with a dull thud on the coffin lid.

The tenants of the Seven Houses opened their eyes wide when they saw Loisi at the side of a very well-dressed gentleman. They nudged each other, cast sidelong glances at the beautiful woman, taking in her dress, cloak, and shoes. Many of them gave themselves a headache in speculation as to what her lingerie must be like—it was quite certain she was not wearing cotton. It was only the sacredness of the place, God's Acre, the old Heiligenstadt Cemetery in which the Gürtlers' had secured burial-space, that kept the women of the Seven Houses from audible expression to their disgust at "that woman", Loisi Kreitmeier, who had had the cheek to show herself publicly in this holy place.

"That's probably her bully," whispered Kalty Link to Frau Phisterer, pointing at Höllriegel.

"Of course, of course," replied Frau Phisterer, her hands joined in prayer, in the middle of an Ave Maria:

"And blessed be thou, Mary, Mother of God, and blessed be the fruit of thy womb. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us! Amen!"

"In the Name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The priest concluded the service at the grave-side, and walked up to Frau Gürtler. He spoke words of comfort, and when he saw that the children themselves were too stricken to support their mother, he looked round the assembled company. His eyes came to rest on Loisi, and the scandal-mongers almost fell flat on their backs when the servant of God said:

"Dear Frau Höllriegel, would you be so kind as to take Frau Gürtler home; the children are too overcome."

Amazement turned to stupefaction when they saw Loisi enter an elegant private carriage with Frau Gürtler and her daughters.

"If I ever come back to earth," said Poldi Löffler, "I'll have one like that, and I shan't need to slave at the washtub any more."

"No, I should hate to have people pointing at me and saying: 'There goes the Kärntner Strasse girl!' I couldn't do it," cried Genoveva Haschka, shrugging her scraggy shoulders.

"That's all very well," giggled Vinzeng Gleichbuber, maliciously, "but nobody would ever want you, except for a clothes-prop." There was a general titter.

The skinny Genoveva whipped round in fury, and her sharp features turned green and yellow.

"You dirty thief! You lazy lout! Fat lot of talking you can do about others! It's pigs like you who always have a good word to say for bad women."

The parties to this debate, and the other mourners, had not noticed that behind them Höllriegel was taking away Adolf, who was almost in a state of collapse and had heard what had been said. A bitter smile wreathed his lips. He knew the human beast well enough; here was a blatant example before his very eyes. These joyless women, whose lives ran in narrow lines, and who hardly knew what true love was, were mercilessly tearing one of themselves to pieces without stopping a moment to consider the true facts of the case.

Then his melancholy smile changed into a bright one.

If they only had the slightest idea what a wonderful woman Loisi was, their hateful tongues would be singing hymns of praise instead of pouring out loathsome gibes.

Mitzi, her lips twitching with rage, was walking by Adolf Gürtler's side. At Genoveva's last remark, she rushed forward, caught the shrew by her coat, and screamed in her face:

"Fie, fie! you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Aunt Loisi is a thousand times better than you; your words are horrid, and so is your face and your mind!"

"The girl's quite right," said Blasius Safer, the richest of all the Brigittenau nurserymen. "She jolly well ought to be ashamed of herself to use such beastly language about a decent woman in a cemetery!"

In the omnibus, rattling homewards, the mourners railed at the stinginess of the Gürtlers in not asking them

in to coffee and cakes, in accordance with the usual custom at funerals.

Herr Xaver Höllriegel had invited Rosl Stollhof to go back in his carriage—to Mitzi's great disgust. Rosl had grown terribly thin.

Since Gürtler's death she had not slept a wink, for she was suffering for Hartl. Where was he? During his last hours, his father had often glanced at the door. It seemed as if he were hoping that his long-lost sons, Hartl and Nazl, would yet turn up in time to give him the joy of reunion before he bade farewell to the world.

Rosl was in a conciliatory mood; but Mitzi, sitting beside her in the carriage, looked out of the window the whole time. Tears poured in a continuous stream down Rosl's cheeks. Her handkerchief was pressed against her mouth; she had lost a guardian who had been a second father to her. Hartl's father; *her* Hartl's father! Even Frau Gürtler would now be helpless to protect her against her invalid mother's hateful nagging and blows. Where was Hartl? Had not it ever occurred to him that his father was torn with anxiety for him, and had died with despair in his heart?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE day after the funeral the postman brought a letter with a Württemburg post-mark. It was addressed to Herr Maxl Gürtler. The postman excused himself.

"You should have received the letter the day before yesterday, but it got mixed up in the *Gärtner-Zeitung*, and Kuntner only came across it this morning. Pardon me, Frau Gürtler, I couldn't help it."

Resi Gürtler went very pale, Rosa tore open the envelope, and shouted: "Mother, mother, it's from Hartl!"

Sitting on the washing-bench, the woman read the few lines over and over. In spite of all her sorrows, there was great joy in the mother's heart.

The news spread from door to door, from house to house. Everywhere the women stood discussing the fact that Hartl Gürtler had written home.

Hansl Dusika, a scatter-brained creature with the maddest notions in his head, invented the story that Hartl had been adopted by a millionaire and was about to return home, sailing up the Danube in his own steamer.

Hansl had read of such happenings in the penny novelettes, "The Bloody Wolf-Countess" and "The Luck of the Poor Seamstress", and now dressed them up to fit Hartl Gürtler. The tale gathered momentum; before it had reached No. 1, Hartl had become the owner of the Ice Factory that, a few years before, had been built in the Klosterneuburger Strasse, and the furniture factory of the Universal Austrian Building Company was now his and along with it the Seven Houses.

"If that's so," babbled old Frau Kratochwil, the porteress of No. 3, "we've got a fine landlord! That dirty Gürtler kid who once smeared jam on my door-knob!"

Rosl Stollhof only heard about Hartl's letter when she returned from work in the evening. Even before she had entered the house, Agnes G'stettner, who was having her nightly meeting with Schani Reder in the passage, touched her on the arm.

"Have you heard the news, Rosl? Hartl Gürtler, your fellow, has written."

Rosl thought the girl was making fun of her. She seized Agnes's arm roughly.

"If you're trying to get a rise on me, I'll pull your hair out!"

"No, no, it's true! Get along and Frau Gürtler will show you!"

Taking three steps at a time, Rosl tore up the two flights. Without knocking, she banged open the door of the Gürtlers' place and shot into the room.

"Is it true, is it true? Has Hartl written?" There were red patches on Rosl's cheeks; her breast was heaving.

"Yes," answered Milli, "he has; he is in Germany."

"Do let me see the letter."

Mitzi was just about to refuse when Frau Gürtler came out of the bedroom. Rosl ran up to her, seized her hand, and kissed her.

"Please let me read Hartl's letter, Frau Gürtler."

Hesitatingly Mitzi took the letter out of her coat-pocket and handed it to Rosl. The agitated girl quickly glanced at the lines. She only saw Hartl's handwriting,

and now knew that he was not dead. This certainly filled her with joy. Hartl, her Hartl, still lived. She did not even notice that the letter contained no greeting, no message for her. For this young and passionate girl, head over ears in love, it sufficed that her loved one was still alive. Nothing else seemed to matter.

"He hasn't even sent you his good wishes," said Mitzi.

Rosl looked at the letter, and then at Mitzi.

"There's nothing in it for you, either, Mitzi. But don't be cross; it's enough for me that he has written. In his next letter perhaps there'll be a message for me and"—Rosl hesitated, and wiped away her tears—"and for you, too, Mitzi."

Mitzi hung her head, shamefaced. She always spoke and behaved so nastily to Rosl, and unkind words were always on her lips. With slow steps she went up to her rival, held out her hand, and spoke tearfully:

"I'm not cross, Rosl, forgive me my unkindness. Poor Herr Gürtler will put in a bad word for me in Heaven because I am always so nasty to you."

Rosl put her arm round Mitzi's neck and kissed the tears from her cheek.

"I've never been bitter about you, Mitzi—and it's not my fault that I'm so fond of Hartl. There's no law against loving and, anyway, I can't help it."

Frau Gürtler retired to the bedroom. She could have cried aloud with sorrow. Here were these two children wrangling with one another and both madly in love with her absent boy, her Hartl, who had a good heart, but whose lack of experience and youthful irresponsibility prevented him from realizing what suffering his pranks had already caused.

Upstairs in her room, Rosl took the letter once more out of its envelope. The post-mark was faint, but with difficulty she deciphered the words: "Reibelsheim Post Calve a.d. Nagold."

"Post Calv, or Calve, a.d. Na-gold," spelt out Rosl. "Where can that be? It's a Württemburg stamp; that's in Germany. Why didn't he write an address?" Mentally, she counted up her savings. She had already saved twenty-four guilders and eighteen kreuzer. This would surely suffice to reach him, but what if Hartl were no longer there? An idea took shape in her simple mind. To-morrow

during the luncheon-hour, she would go to the office of the "Danzers Orpheum" and make inquiries whether there was a theatre in Calve or Reibelsheim in which acrobatic shows were given.

Rosl slept little that night. Her thoughts were with Hartl, whom she seemed to see flying through the air in his tights. She fancied she was in an enormous theatre where thousands of people shouted themselves hoarse with the words: "Bravo, Hartl! Bravo, Hartl!" She, too, clapped her hands and shouted. She stood up in her seat and shouted with all her might: "Bravo, Hartl! Bravo! Bravo!"

"Have you gone mad? How dare you make such a noise in the middle of the night? If you wake me again, I'll box your ears!"

Somewhat sobered, Rosl sat up in her bed. Through the window the moonlight streamed in and covered everything with a mysterious silver light. Her mother's rough words could not dispel the beautiful dream of the boy she loved so dearly. She nestled back in her pillow, pulled the heavy eiderdown over her, and muttered happily to herself the name "Hartl".

Her eyes closed, and for the rest of the night she slept peacefully.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE baboon tugged at the ropes, the bell-clappers swayed madly to and fro in their metal bodies. The noise seemed to give much pleasure to the monkeys.

"Walk in! Walk in! Dogs, monkeys, and ponies! No other circus has so many! Sixty ponies, a hundred and fifty dogs, and three hundred monkeys!"

"Monkeys, monkeys! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, monkeys!"

A grey parrot balanced itself on the proprietress's shoulder and shrieked the works, with infectious laughter at the public. At the same time he left a permanent memento of himself in the shape of whitish-grey stains on the woman's red blouse, opened his beak, and sang:

"Je suis toujours
Comme il faut,
Ha, hahaha
Merde, merde!"

The crowd round the show booth laughed at the talkative bird. The more they laughed, the louder shrieked the parrot. No one could resist the feathered humourist, and one spectator after another joined in. Tears ran from their eyes, and they tried to suppress their laughter—all in vain. They opened their mouths, and let their laughter explode into sneezes, bawls, and coughs.

The monkey tugged at the bell-ropes, the music from the merry-go-rounds mingled with the bells on the other side; the parrot laughed, sang, and shrieked his *merde merde* at the crowd.

"The next performance is about to begin, *messieurs et mesdames*; buy your tickets at once, or you won't find seats. Inside you'll laugh even more. Laughing is healthy. Laughing is as good as medicine."

Hartl paused in his speech of welcome to help an aged peasant-woman, whose obesity was an obstacle, to mount the steps. The old woman clutched her purse nervously, and pushed the clown's hand away.

"Attention, *maman!* All these circus people are thieves," whispered a stalwart Fleming.

The people continued to crowd in. The deafening noise of all the shouting, steam-organs, and bells, the smell of the Dutch pastry and hot sausage stalls mingled with the scent of cigarettes and pipes, the gaudy advertisements on the walls and the brightly-coloured clothes of the "artistes" made their appeal to eye, ear, and nose, and simultaneously bewitched them.

Hartl's shining eyes, surrounded by rims of white paint, looked out from beneath his pointed clown's hat. The life and movement of the holiday-makers of Laeken a Brussels suburb, interested him.

He had joined the Wallenta Circus the day before. True, he was not yet an active working member of the troupe. For the moment he was only the announcer and cage-cleaner. Hartl was happy to have reached the goal of his long journey. Here he would recover from all his hardships; here he would build up a new existence, for he and Schorsch, who was assisting in the ring during the performing horses' act, were planning to produce a new comic turn. Hartl had thought of a new idea on the way, and when he had saved sufficient money they would

put on a big animal act, something quite new, something that the world had not yet seen.

Although he felt well and hearty to-day, a certain tired feeling came over him.

Hartl had wandered for weeks before he reached Liège, and learned to his consternation that the Wallenta Circus had moved on. From the police he heard that the show had now taken up its quarters in Laeken.

Hartl's luck had not changed on his wanderings until he reached the Rhineland. For days in the Baden district he had been accompanied by a gipsy woman, who pursued him with her love.

Once when the youth was bathing in the Neckar, as he reached the bank a young, full-bosomed woman stepped out from behind a bush. She had taken off her clothes, and she beckoned to Hartl to come to her. A deep blush came over his face, and he hid his nakedness with both hands.

"Don't be so shy, young man. Come here, and I'll show you what love is. God! What muscles!"

With a feeling of disgust, Hartl loosed himself from the touch of her dirty hands, snatched up his clothes and knapsack, and ran to the nearest bush. The woman ran after him, but Puppy intercepted her, and barked in a loud and threatening manner.

When, after a while, Hartl emerged, fully clothed, from behind the bush, she was sitting in her ragged clothes by the water, letting the ripples of the Neckar play over her legs and feet. She got up at once, took a little bundle that lay close to her on the grass, and attached herself to Hartl.

"You are shy, dearie, aren't you? I wouldn't have bitten you. Are you an honorary member of a Catholic Youth Society?"

Growling, Puppy ran between her master and the gipsy. When she laid her hand on Hartl's shoulder the little animal seized her by the coat and with her sharp teeth tore a hole in it. The woman screamed and kicked out at the dog, and at that moment Puppy bit her in the calf. She screamed in dismay and fell down.

"Puppy! Come here!"

With upper lip curled back, showing her teeth, the animal stood snarling, ready at any moment to bite the woman's

legs anew, while Hartl helped the gipsy to get up. There was a drop of blood on her ankle and the marks of the teeth were clear.

"What a brute! If I had a stone I'd throw it at the beast."

It was impossible to throw her off; for days she followed Hartl and pestered him with her attentions. He would willingly have asked a gendarme or village policeman to free him from the woman, but he did not dare. As far as possible, he kept away from all officials. The danger of being sent back over the Austrian frontier was too great. Good-natured pedlars and tramps had warned him of this. As personal papers he had only his certificate of baptism, and this showed him to be only sixteen years old. At this age it was not legal to go on the roads.

When Hartl spent the night in a village his companion left him but remained in the neighbourhood of the house where he had put up, and he could be certain that in the morning—be it ever so early—she would be waiting at the door.

One morning she had disappeared. With a light heart Hartl started off. As he passed by the village fire-station he heard a female voice. It was the gipsy woman who had been arrested by the police during the night and locked up.

"Ha, you chaste Joseph, you tender-foot! You're a fine fool! You could have learned something from me, but it's not too late. I'll be free in an hour and I'll follow you. You still have a chance of taking me in your arms."

Puppy sprang furiously at the window of the fire-station. The hussy looked for something to throw at her.

"Puppy! Come here!"

Hartl hurried down the street. When, after two hours, he reached a market-town that boasted a railway-station, he bought himself and Puppy tickets for the next town and so freed himself from the terrible woman. In Mainz luck again favoured Hartl.

Late in the evening he was wandering down the streets on the Rhine looking for an inn where he might give a performance. He had done well and soon would be thinking of night-quarters, when he came to the ale-house known as "The Golden Goose". The doors stood wide open, the house was full and Hartl went in.

Humbly he asked the host whether he might do some tricks before his honoured guests.

Hartl's appearance and manner were always a good advertisement for him, and it was seldom that his request was refused.

"I'll ask the guests," answered the host. "Look here boys, listen! Here's a great artiste from the Court Theatre in Karlsruhe. Would you like to see his tricks?"

"Rather! Produce your Hamlet!"

"Is it Devrient?"

"Idiot, it's Adelina Patti. She is going to sing the Aria out of the Schreifritz in tights."

Hartl first sang the Song of the Orphan.

"All alone 'neath the winter's sky
The homeless orphan lad slinks by,
Famished and cold he can tramp no more,
And crouches at last in a barn-yard door.
Sadly he looks at the darkening sky:
'Dear God,' he cries, 'oh, let me die!
Take me to Heaven, for there I shall find
My mother who died and left me behind!'"

Tears came to the eyes of a bibulous Bavarian; he gulped, washed down the pain with a glass of good wine, took a thaler out of his pocket and threw it to Hartl.

"Yes, yes," he sighed, "it's a fine song, it makes me want to have a good weep. Come along here; listen, you can sing me that song over again. Drink, you young devil!"

The tricks earned him the attention of some gentlemen in frock-coats who had come down from the next floor and were regaling themselves at the bar.

"Young fellow!" called out a paunchy gentleman from Cologne. "You come upstairs with me and do some of your tricks!"

Upstairs there was a wedding-party. High jinks were going on. The bride, young and beautiful, heated from much dancing, passed from hand to hand. The bridegroom tore off Hartl's cloak and admired the muscles of his arms and with one pull jerked him on to the table. He was the son of a master-butcher, Captain of the "Tausend Pfund" Athletic Club and proud of his strength.

"Silence!" someone shouted, and the band in alarm stopped in the middle of a waltz.

All eyes were turned on the well-built, muscular youth. His tights fitted closely to his body; only at the knee

joints they hung a little loosely. His legs had grown thinner.

Hartl took three bottles, asked the musicians to play the tune of the "Jolly Coppersmith" slowly, and began to juggle. Everyone clapped.

The bride took a plate from the table, wiped the sweat from her rosy cheeks with her bridal veil and handed the plate to her young husband. He felt in his pocket, extracted a twenty-mark piece and threw it on the plate. The young woman went round the table collecting. Thalers, gold pieces and notes fell on to the plate.

Puppy had to repeat her tricks many times.

The bride treated Hartl as her guest, piled food before him, prepared him a big packet of meat and cake, and kissed the young man on the mouth when he would have bowed to kiss her hand.

Hartl grew red all over.

In the silent streets Puppy ran along at her master's side. In her mouth she carried a goose-leg that a jovial guest had thrown after her.

In the lodging-house bedroom Hartl counted his earnings. That evening had brought him two hundred and eighty-four marks. With the money he had already saved he now had four hundred marks. He decided he would tramp no more. Puppy buried her goose-bone under the carpet by the bed.

The next day Hartl bought himself a cheap suit, some linen, and a fourth-class ticket to the Belgian frontier. For Puppy he bought a dog-ticket. By the next morning he was at Liège and a day later, a Saturday, he reached Brussels.

On Monday the two young artistes began to rehearse.

Schorsch's path in the circus artistes' profession had been no smooth one. With Thima he had learned practically nothing. When the troupe was broken up he went to Berlin, and was taken on by Wallenta, whose Dog and Monkey Show was performing at the Hasenheide.

Wallenta promised both boys a chance of playing in the new turns at the Sunday afternoon performance.

The rehearsals for the show made Hartl and Schorsch laugh so much that they were unable to fix up the turn as quickly as they had expected. Every day they rehearsed three or four hours in an empty baggage van. Each moment of rest was taken up with discussions, generally developing

into hot disputes. When, as often happened, the matter reached the point of fists, Schorsch, though two years older, often found himself well knocked about by Hartl.

But these disputes did not seriously interfere with the rehearsals. The children playing about outside round the circus vans, heard the laughter of the two future "Black-Faced Comedians", and joined in with it. The grey parrot found he had serious rivals as the champion laugher, and tried to outscream them. Director Wallenta, passing by the van with his daughter, and hearing the laughter, would say to her: "If the public only laughs half as much as these two clowns, they'll be a fine success."

Schorsch had thought out a special advertisement, and went to Friedländer at Hamburg to inquire what it would cost to print. He wanted immediately to take Hartl to a photographer's, so as to have something ready to show agents, or to send round as circulars. But Hartl was more cautious, and naturally, for the money was his. Schorsch hadn't a penny in the world: or if ever he had he spent it all, largely on scent and unguents which were a necessity for him. His hair was so redolent of this cheap stuff that when he came near the monkeys would retreat to the farthest corners of their cages.

The new turn was to be given for the first time at Louvain. The circus, rectangular in shape, with a stage erected at one end, presented a strange appearance before the performance. The monkeys in the side cages were accustomed, while awaiting their own turn, to display more or less pink behinds to the public, while the dogs, as though outraged by this scandalous behaviour, set up an infernal bellowing. The ponies manufactured manure and whisked the flies away from it with their long tails, in order that the tormentors might keep all their appetite for the spectators. The parrots carried on like deputies in the Austrian Parliament, shouting each other down in fourteen languages. Koko laughed, sang and croaked his "Merde, Merde", as a refrain.

To-day Hartl was relieved of the duty of welcoming the public. He sat by Schorsch in the baggage van and burned corks with which to blacken their faces. Schorsch, already made up, imparted advice to Hartl.

"Look here, my good chap. First your mouth's got to be red all over, so that it spreads half across your cheek. That's right. Now you want some white round your eyes.

My good chap, your ears are still absolutely white and so's your neck up here. Here, don't make a mess of it all. You know, you must throw out a word or two of broken English among the French. That'll make an impression on these fools. Now my good chap where's the board and the nail? My good chap——"

"Look here, Schorsch, if you don't put a stop to that everlasting, 'my good chap' I'll plump you one that'll send you on to the stage as a corpse."

The boys' number came third. They had only a narrow space in the front of the stage for it, as the back part was meanwhile being rigged up for Fräulein Cilly Wallenta and her birds.

Ponies, ridden by monkeys in red coats, went round the stage in a circle. In silence, with grim faces, the apes sat on their steeds, and showed their annoyance at the fact that certain excretions found a way into their breeches, causing an unpleasant moisture. More than one, in an unguarded moment, put a paw to the place of discomfort, withdrew it to his nose, made a grimace, and scattered the nasty stuff on to the first row of the audience. The ponies shook their heads in disapproval of these ungentlemanly riders, so that the tufts on them waved about.

The parrots, kakadus and arrasse, accustomed to the odour of their lady and mistress, set up a loud scream as the misbehaviour of the monkeys became perceptible to their nostrils, while Koko, outside, emitted a shriek of laughter and shouted "Merde".

"My good chap— Why, what's the matter? What are you getting angry about?"

Hartl had given Schorsch a good blow in the hollow of the knee.

"Shut up. Do you mean to start off again with your everlasting 'good chap'?"

"I see you've got the needle properly. You're shivering like an aspen leaf. Come, pull yourself together. You'll be all right."

At last the curtain fell. Schorsch ran to the opposite end of the stage. An attendant carefully removed the excrement of the ponies. The band was playing a march, but when the bell rang it broke off and started in on a Strauss waltz. Hartl had insisted on this, though Schorsch was all for a Berlin street song.

As the curtain slowly slipped up the stout wooden poles, Hartl's heart was beating fast. He had never yet known stage fright. With Thima he had been a mere clown, while his escapades in the air as "Flying Devil" had been thoroughly enjoyable, and every night he had looked forward to the certain applause of the crowd for his slick performance of unusual feats. But this time it was quite a different matter. The public could not be won over by a couple of sleight-of-hand tricks at the beginning of the turn. It was the later comic tricks that would count. Schorsch had always said, during the rehearsals when they themselves were doubled up with laughter, that only these comic tricks were sure to be a success. If the "artistes" themselves laughed like this, what would the public do ? Fairly roar ! Whereupon Schorsch himself relapsed into hopeless laughter and infected Hartl with it. But to-day, strange to say, neither of them felt in the least inclined to laughter.

Schorsch should have been the first to come on the stage from the left side. His black-gloved hands were fidgeting with his woollen wig, and through coats of paint he stared out at Hartl.

Hartl was waiting for him to go on the stage, From the wings Schorsch beckoned to him to go on first himself. Hartl, forgetting that he was now a true Yankee "Black Faced Comedian", and that the curtain was up so that every word spoken on the stage could be clearly heard by the public, shouted at him : "Come on you fool, how long are you going to stand waiting there ?"

Schorsch's stupid eyes showed even whiter than before, and once again, with urgent gestures, he invited Hartl to take the lead. Hartl shouted across at him. "You just wait till we're through, and then I'll give you something." Then he put his hands on the ground and did an acrobat's entrance. After circling round on his hands, he gradually lowered himself to the ground. Schorsch, who should have been following his gyrations with comical antics, should now have seized the recumbent Hartl and pulled him up by the coat collar, which was to tear right off.

But Schorsch had completely lost his head. Hartl shouted at him. "Come on, you blighter !" whereupon Schorsch ran round the stage, as he should have done before, and forgot to sieze Hartl by the collar. Schorsch had bungled the whole business and ran helplessly round the stage, while not one

member of the stolid Belgian public so much as smiled. Only one little girl screamed out.

Schorsch was to have brought a hammer and nail, driven the nail into Hartl's belly, and hung his coat on it. At last he remembered and fetched the hammer and nail. But even this went wrong. The piece of wood under Hartl's waistcoat broke, and he had to give a kick to stop Schorsch from really hammering the nail into his belly. The spectators meanwhile remained totally unmoved. Not a soul laughed. And Schorsch forgot the next turn, a comical jig, also.

The Director left the auditorium, rushed on to the stage, seized the curtain cord, and just at a moment when Hartl for a moment altogether disconcerted by his partner's idiocy, stood gazing foolishly at the public, the heavy curtain descended and the rod caught him hard on the forehead, knocking him down. His big boots, bought specially for the occasion, were thrust out towards the astonished public revealing the punctured soles.

Only two hands moved to clap. They were the hands of Director Wallenta, clapped in quick succession on the cheeks of the two "Black-Faced Comedians". There followed two heavy kicks, dismissing the artistes from the stage.

Hartl was furious. Even if the number had not been a tremendous success it might have gone down with the ordinary public, specially the final turn in which Schorsch was to do somersaults while Hartl sang a nigger song and juggled, with Puppy circling on his front paws. With an angry shout he turned upon his partner and thrashed him.

So now with an enormous bump on his forehead, and minus 98 marks expended on various preparations, though the richer by one experience, Hartl sat at the end of the eventful day in his little inn room, and swore never again to attempt the rôle of the comedian.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"NO, Fräulein," said the pleasant gentleman, "there's certainly no variety theatre in that little place. Why, I don't think even entertainers or circus-men would work there. A little place which hasn't even got a post-stage would not attract any travelling artistes."

With a dejected expression Rosl stood in front of the friendly gentleman in the office of "Danzers Orpheum". She had hoped to get definite information about the place and the theatre which she was sure must be there. Now her hope had vanished. The manager's heart was touched. He said:

"You'd best apply to the editorial office of the *Artist*, 28a Wehrhahn, Düsseldorf. Send them a stamped and addressed envelope, and ask them all you want to know. They'll be sure to be able to tell you."

"Have you by chance a copy of that paper here, which I could look at?"

"Here you are, you can have the whole bundle, take them along with you."

"Thank you ever so much."

That evening Rosl put her work aside, and sat, with her head in her hands, over the old numbers of the *Artist*. She was interested in the illustrations of artistes of every description, but especially those of acrobats, and above all flying acrobats. Once or twice she thought she recognized her beloved: but none of the photos were as beautiful as she pictured him.

She pored eagerly over the lists of agents, artistes, and artistes' quarters, but Hartl's name was not on the list of those for whom letters were waiting at the editorial office.

All day Rosl was pondering over the letter which was to bring from Düsseldorf the news she wanted. Time after time she tore up long letters, until finally she achieved the compression of her questions into the shortest formula, inquiring whether anything was known of the whereabouts of Richardl Gürtler, acrobat, formerly of the "Flying Devils" troupe, which he had left some months before the railway accident in America. His last letter had been posted a week ago at Reibelsheim, Post Calv or Calve, in Württemburg. The undersigned begged to be informed whether there was any variety theatre or circus there, and how, in any event, she could discover the whereabouts of Richardl Gürtler.

A week passed while she anxiously awaited news. When the answer at last arrived, she was sure it would contain Hartl's address. Carefully, almost reverently, she opened it, and read:

To Fräulein Rosl Stollhof
4 Burkhardtgasse. (No. 15)
Vienna II.

Dear Madam,

In answer to yours, we regret to inform you that we are unable to supply the address of Mr. Richard Gürtler.

There is no theatre or circus in the place you mention.

It would be best if you were to send any letters for the person you seek to our office. His name will then be printed for six months in our paper, which is read by almost all travelling variety and circus artistes, so that there is every likelihood of it reaching the notice of the addressee.

We would further suggest to you that you put a small advertisement in our paper, which will certainly be seen directly by the artiste, or brought to his notice by someone else. We send you by newspaper post a copy of the paper with advertisement tariff.

In conclusion, we beg to sign ourselves with the usual professional greeting: "Good luck to poor acrobats".

Yours faithfully,

Rosl read these lines again and again, then went over to the Gürtlers and read it to them.

The next day the latest number of the *Artist* arrived. The four girls sat with their eyes glued to the pages, and studied the whole paper, articles and advertisements alike.

"Look here Rosl," called Mitzi. "There are four chaps in tights just like Hartl and Mr. Chiesi used to wear."

"They're only stage-floor acrobats," answered Rosl Stollhof. "They work on the ground. That's not half so dangerous as what Hartl does."

"Hi! Look here! Here's a buffoon playing a harmonica with eight sides." Milli drew her finger across the page.

Rosl turned the pages over and over, till her eye caught a specially large advertisement, with the name "Chiesi". "Now then, keep quiet," she said. And the four girls, their heads pressed close together, read out half aloud:

NOTICE!

"The Royal Notary's Office at Ravenna requests anybody who has information regarding the whereabouts of Richard Gürtler, of Vienna, formerly a member of the 'Flying Devils' troupe (whose manager, Giovanni Chiesi, was killed in the collapse of the great bridge over the Alleghany River at Pittsberg), to bring this to the notice of this office.

"The Royal Notary's Office.
"Ravenna, Italy.
"On behalf of the Public Trustee."

"What's that mean?" asked Rosa Gürtler. And Rosl Stollhof replied. "Public Trustee? I know. Once I got a legacy of 20 guilders from an uncle, and then I got a letter from the Public Trustee. I'll tell you what. Hartl's got a legacy."

Two days later a representative of the Italian Consulate in Vienna appeared at the Gürtler's house. Mitzi in high excitement, fetched Hartl's mother from the laundry.

"Are you Frau Gürtler?"

"Yes, will you kindly sit down? You run away now, children."

"Could I speak to Herr Gürtler."

"No, no. He's just been laid to rest," answered Frau Gürtler, drawing a corner of her dress across her eyes.

"Really. I'm very sorry. Well then, perhaps you can answer all questions."

"Certainly."

"No doubt you will have heard that Giovanni Chiesi, in whose troupe your son Richard was employed, recently met his death in an accident. Mr. Chiesi left in his will a clause providing that until Richard Gürtler became an independent earner his parents should receive on his behalf a monthly allowance of one hundred lire. Further, Mr. Chiesi left to Richard Gürtler a sum of fifteen thousand lire to be paid to him on his twentieth birthday. If however, before that date Richard Gürtler should require money for the purpose of acquiring or improving a show of his own, then up to half of this sum can be advanced to him."

The speaker laid the paper on the table and looked across at Frau Gürtler. "Where is your son Richard at present?" he asked.

"We have no idea. We heard he had fallen sick in

Bucharest. After lying some weeks in hospital there he went off somewhere else. A few days ago a letter came from him with the postmark of a village in Germany. We have made inquiries, but nobody there knows anything about him."

"Please let me have news of your son as soon as you hear anything of him."

When the foreigner had left the room, Frau Gürtler picked up his card and read: "Pietro Francerconi, Royal Italian Consulate-General, Vienna."

She heaved a deep maternal sigh. The whole affairs of the household were always revolving round Hartl. Ignaz was no less her son than Hartl, and she loved her children without preferences. Where was Hartl? Where could the boy be? She went across to the cupboard and knelt in front of the glass door, which had an image of Mary and the Holy Child. Folding her hands, she prayed fervently.

"Holy Mary, Mother of Heaven, I beg thee let me live to see my boy again. Mother of God, protect him on his way."

Underneath, the workmen from the Builder's Works were trudging home, the older ones bowed, with sparse hair combed crookedly across their forehead, while the younger wore their caps aslant. One of them sang:

"I, Lord, I want no Paradise,
I find Vienna much too nice:
And wouldn't change for any price."

Frau Gürtler stood at the window. Her eyes rested on the far-off line of hills, the Wiener Wald. From below she heard the noisy song. Hartl, too, cared for only one town, one Vienna, one Austria. None the less, he was wandering about through the world, leaving his dear ones, without a word of news, leaving them and above all his mother, with her breaking heart, to worry over him, causing sorrow without meaning to.

A new song resounded now:

"Once on a time of Heaven I dreamed,
So beautiful it was, so bright
That when I'd had that dream, it seemed
This earth was full of Heavenly light."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LIKE machine-gun fire, round on round of clapping ran through the audience in the *Palais d'Été* Variety Theatre.

Philadelphia bowed, Soliman and Rajah were on either side of him, while the other three elephants stood with front legs on a tub, waving their trunks in wide circles.

Thrice the curtain went up, and the tamer bowed. If only the applause would stop! For outside, in the changing room, Mr. Philadelphia was awaited by police-inspectors.

Near by, in the court where the elephants were housed, Wenzel Sokoup, the keeper, lay dead, covered with a blanket. Soliman had killed him just before the performance.

Six years before Wenzel had been a keeper in the great American animal show of Wallace Brothers. He drank, and treated the elephants committed to his care with the greatest brutality; had he not been a first-class tamer, he would have been dismissed long before. But if he was good at breaking in the thick-skinned giants, he was unable to make them perform.

One day the Menagerie was inspected by representatives of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and had to pay a fine of 500 dollarsfor brutal mishandling of animals. The elephants showed ugly wounds where they had been prodded with the iron hook. The splendid creature called Soliman was in a specially bad condition, with running sores on his body, and big rents in his ears.

Wenzel Sokoup was immediately dismissed, and condemned to three months' imprisonment for tormenting animals. After packing up his belongings, he went back to the elephant's quarters, took an iron prodder and gave Soliman a deep thrust under the eye.

Six years had passed. Soliman had long since passed into the possession of Philadelphia, and now performed in his show. When Philadelphia's keeper married, Wenzel Sokoup, who had excellent references, was taken on in his place. He had arrived that evening, and immediately began working.

Wenzel went with the old keeper into the elephant's yard. He first made the acquaintance of "Piff", a very tame female, then of "Mira", who didn't for a moment

stop waving her head, then of "Rajah" and "President". "And the last is our best performer," said the other. "He's called 'Soliman'."

"Soliman?" answered Wenzel. "Soliman? Have you had him long?"

"We got him at Tampico about three years ago from the Wallace Show."

"In that case he's an old friend of mine."

As soon as Wenzel opened his mouth Soliman had put back his gigantic torn ears and listened. Surely he knew that voice? Wasn't that the brute who had always tormented him? Had he come back? He waved his trunk, remembering the years of misery he had suffered from this man.

An hour later the animals were all ready for the performance. Wenzel, with the prodder in his hand, passed by Soliman. Cruelly he prodded the elephant in the sore place in his head. The chains were taken off the front legs. Sokoup went round behind him, brushing along the wall. The elephant waited till the man was opposite his middle, and then threw his weight against him, crushing him to the wall.

Sokoup did no more than groan deeply. The elephant was avenging all the torments inflicted upon himself, his brothers and his sisters. More and more firmly he pressed his tons of flesh upon the cruel warder, till he had broken every rib and joint in his body.

The second keeper's attention was roused. He rushed in. Immediately Soliman removed his weight from Sokoup, who collapsed in a heap. With a gentle kick Soliman, quite unperturbed, propelled the corpse to the door, and expressed his satisfaction at the work of revenge with a quiet rumbling.

The police official concluded his interview with Mr. Philadelphia, and took over Wenzel's passport and references. "Soliman is the best animal in the world," said Philadelphia. "He worked to-day just like any other day, and it's hard for me to imagine what put this deed into his head. But my old keeper tells me that Wenzel Sokoup said he had known Soliman. I can only suppose that the elephant has taken his revenge for some act of cruelty. Elephants have a wonderful memory."

It was Richard Gürtler who came to take Wenzel

Sokoup's place. For days he had wandered round Brussels, looking for work, quite in vain. At the "Circus Carré" which was performing in the town they had no place for him. Then Hartl heard the news of Sokoup's death, applied to Philadelphia, and got taken on in his place.

The elephants investigated the person of the new keeper with their trunks, and showed approval. Their wonderful intelligence said to them that this was a good man. And from the first day Hartl was a friend to all five of them. Soliman in particular had taken an affection to him, and emitted contented snorts every morning when he heard the key turn in the gate.

Philadelphia, too, was captivated by Hartl. He liked his appearance, and his cleanliness of body and dress guaranteed that he would be a good warder.

A week later was the end of the month. Philadelphia, his animals and employees, embarked at Antwerp on the White Star liner *Cymbria* for a great tour through South Africa, India, and Australia as part of Richard's Circus.

Two years passed, two long years which went very quickly for Hartl. He had plenty of work to do, but was even more occupied in observing and absorbing experience.

The Sundays he had spent with Herr Xaver Höllriegel in Vienna had been profitable to his mind. Höllriegel and Loisi too, had initiated the lad in the beauties of German literature, so that he knew what to read and how to read. He had read the works of the great heroes of mankind, explorers and travellers, as well as general scientific literature. Moreover, he had thought over what he read, and if he didn't understand something had applied for explanations to Herr Höllriegel, who, despite his Viennese gaiety, which at first seemed to indicate superficiality, was a cultured and educated man.

Hartl had purchased in Antwerp, with the greater part of what remained of his savings, linen, clothes, and shoes. He only stuck to a reserve of 50 marks which he would not break in upon.

There was little for the keepers to do during the trip to the Cape. The Dutchman spent most of his time in the bar, or flirting, but Hartl sat at the extremity of the ship's bows in a deck-chair lent him by the steward. There he read book after book, and when one day Philadelphia

found him deep in the tale of Stanley's wonderful expedition across Africa, he asked him if he could read English.

The celebrated tamer now learned for the first time something of the history of his new keeper. He remembered Chiesi, and was astounded to see tears in the keeper's eyes when he spoke of his former master.

There is not much sentiment, generally, among performers, nor is it any secret that acrobatic apprentices have a particularly hard time, and are often maltreated by their masters and fellow performers. The elephant tamer was astonished, then, to see this young fellow shed tears over his deceased master. He was even more astonished to learn that Hartl neither smoked nor drank.

"Well, I expect you take it out on the girls," he said.

Hartl blushed, and smiled rather foolishly. "No, Mr. Philadelphia, I'm engaged." Philadelphia looked amused. "Where is your young lady?" he asked.

"In Vienna."

"Do you often write to her?"

"No, never. I don't mean to write to her till I can tell her that I've brought a turn of my own on to the stage."

Philadelphia stared at Hartl with a new-born respect in his eyes.

"How old are you then?"

"I'll be seventeen next May."

Philadelphia's astonishment increased. He had taken the fellow to be at least twenty. He looked young enough certainly but his well-developed muscular figure and his composed manner made him appear older.

"Does your girl allow you to wander alone all over the place? What does she write to you?"

"We never write, Mr. Philadelphia. I'll write to her when I've made my way."

The tamer shook his head.

"What kind of work do you want to begin at then?"

"I want to show wild animals."

"That's not so easy as you think. It needs courage, perseverance, and hard cash. Have you any ideas about it?"

"I've got courage and perseverance, Mr. Philadelphia. And as to what ideas I've got, well, my way of working will be a lot different from what I see around."

"Is that a fact?" The tamer smiled faintly. "Well, what are these new ideas of yours?"

"I won't have any whips, or prongs or guns. There'll be no galloping to music, or fuss and bother of that sort. The orchestra will play a waltz and I'll have only a rhinoceros-hide stick in my hand."

"And do you believe that you won't be hurt? Are you going to train them without a whip?"

"Yes, I am, Mr. Philadelphia. It'll only take a bit longer than the usual way of training."

"Well, well, perhaps you'll change your mind when you've had a bit of experience."

With tenacity Hartl pursued his goal. He made experiments in new tricks and more humane methods of training. He learnt that animals could not be made tractable by brute force alone, but that it was an absolute necessity to enter into their minds and habits. The individuality of each beast had to be studied and each required different treatment. Even animals of the same species had varying degrees of intelligence. A classic example of this was to be found in the elephant "Soliman", the murderer of Sokoup. Soliman was good-tempered, as people with fat paunches usually are. Good-tempered so long as they are not afflicted with too great torments. But for all their good temper such people never forget an injury and will await patiently an opportunity to avenge themselves. It is the same with animals of high intelligence. Hartl realized that with certain animals it was absurd to speak only of instinct. Intelligence was to be found in the animal world just as much as in the world of men. Soliman was a good example of this. Six years before he had fostered thoughts of revenge, and when the opportunity offered itself he carried out his plan.

Hartl's hand hung over the arm of his deck-chair. Puppy, who never left his side, stretched her neck and rubbed her cold nose against it. This little fox-terrier bitch had taught him many things about animals. During those lonely days when he had tramped the country-side she had been the boy's only companion. Never had she received a blow from her master's hand. Hartl had taught her her tricks as though it were all part of a game. He had spent hours over them, repeating each word to her over and over again, while making the appropriate movements in order to impress it on her animal mind; he had taught Puppy to think and the fruit of his teaching greatly astonished

and pleased him. He wished to test his system also on the wild beasts which he hoped to acquire. Even if the intelligence of the big felines was not on the same level as that of elephants, horses, dogs and so on, nevertheless a great deal more could be done with them than had hitherto been attempted by the trainers.

Hartl's thoughts flowed on uninterruptedly. He had bought books on animals and their mentality, studied them industriously and made notes and sketches of the tricks he hoped to teach his animals. In a few months he had his act all ready on paper.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE notary's advertisement appeared regularly in the *Artist,* for he hoped that Hartl was still in the circus world. A reward of five hundred lire was offered to whoever could give information about the whereabouts of Richard Gürtler, a former member of the "Flying Devils". The announcement appeared also in the American professional papers, and all the professional organizations were informed; in Germany the *International Union of Artists* and in America *The White Rat.*

Although many variety artistes remembered Hartl from the days of the Chiesi troupe, by a whim of fate it so happened that he never ran into any of these companions of former days. A London agency had collected the troupe for Richard's Circus, whose headquarters was in South Africa, and it chanced that among the artistes there was no one who had worked with the "Flying Devils"; the names of the animal trainers and assistants were not known to the agent.

The older members of Richard's Circus had not been in Europe or America for many years and therefore did not know anything about Hartl. Chances like this are oftener found in life than in fiction.

Some time after Schorsch had received the thrashing from Hartl for his forgetfulness it happened that he came across the advertisement. He wanted to earn the promised five hundred lire and so he wrote all that he knew to the executor.

After some weeks an official appeared in Namur, where the Wallenta Circus had pitched its tent.

The man took down the evidence in due form, had it corroborated by the manager, and went away without giving Schorsch more than twenty francs. The five hundred lire was only for the person who could give some information as to the present whereabouts of Richard Gürtler. This Schorsch was not able to do.

The agent made inquiries in Brussels, Liège, Ghent and Antwerp, but no one was able to help him in discovering the present abode of the missing youth. Disgruntled he left the neighbourhood. He went to Vienna and visited Hartl's mother. Here the news that Hartl had been with the Wallenta Circus in Belgium came as a great surprise, and now for the first time Frau Gürtler was able to understand Hartl's conduct. The lad was so proud; poor, and no longer able to do aerial acrobatic work, he felt humiliated and for that reason only had not written home. She was overjoyed to hear that her Hartl was still alive.

With glowing eyes Mitzi listened to the words of the foreign gentleman. She, too, believed in Hartl and felt sure that he would some day come home.

In the evening Rosl Stollhof heard the news. She danced into the room and was gayer than she had been for a long time.

"Just you see, Frau Gürtler, one day Hartl will come back and he'll be a fine grand man with lots of money."

How great was the astonishment of Emilie Gürtler when the next day the postman brought a registered letter with many foreign stamps and five red seals on the envelope and asked the girl to call Herr Gürtler.

"Father's dead. You'll have to take the letter away again."

"Shut up, you silly," said Rosa. "Mother can just as well have the letter. Wait a minute, Herr Pospischil, I'll call her at once."

The postman rubbed his red nose. Curse it, this was silly. Could he deliver the letter to the widow?

Frau Gürtler came down from the attic.

"Yes, Herr Pospischil, you know my man's gone. Who is the letter from?"

Pospischil turned the letter over in his hand and looked at the five seals.

Rosa leant over the man's hand. "Heavens! Mother! It's from Hartl!"

Frau Gürtler had to sit down on the washing bench. With trembling fingers she signed for it and gave the man a tip.

"I say, mother, look at the stamp! It's from Johannesburg. The letter is from Africa!"

"Read it out, you slow-coach!" shouted the sisters impatiently.

Carefully, seeking for an opening with a hairpin, Emilie tore open the envelope.

"Look at the signature to see if it's really from Hartl!"

"Yes, mother," rejoiced the girl, "it says 'your son Hartl'."

Frau Gürtler sighed; during sleepless nights she had lived through anxious hours. The fear that she might never see her Hartl again had at times conquered all hopes. Now the lad had written. Her joy was great. The child of her affliction was alive.

"Read it, you sleepy Gretel," called out Rosa. "What does it say? Why hasn't he written for so long? Where is he now?"

"Well, then, listen!"

Now Mitzi rushed in from outside. The postman had told her at the house-door that the lost Hartl had sent a letter from Kaffirland.

"What is it? A letter from Hartl? What does he say? The postman says that he's among the savages!"

"Look here, mother!" broke in Emilie. "Here's a white paper with something written in a foreign language —get along, Mitzi, you learn foreign languages, what does it say?"

"Read out the letter first, I want to know what the boy says."

They went into the living-room. Milli seated herself on the sofa, while Mitzi tried to decipher the printing by the window.

Dear Parents,

I'm sorry I have not written to you for so long, but I did not want to worry you. I was ill in Bucharest and had to give up my job with Mr. Chiesi. He treated me very badly. He told me that he had left some

money for me at the hospital office, and when I left the ward I found that there was no money there. I had to shift for myself. I could not make up my mind to write to you for a long time because I was afraid that you would insist that I should come home. I was afraid I would have to go back to school, so I never wrote. Now at last I have got a job again, although I cannot now do aerial acrobatic work, so cannot earn so much money.

Dear Father and Mother, do not be angry with me, I must do what I set out to do and I can't do it in Vienna. I am very homesick for Vienna and especially for all of you and the Seven Houses. Now I know how much home, Vienna and especially the Brigittenau, means to me. The world is fine and I have seen a lot of things, but there is nothing so fine as our Vienna. When I hear Vienna music it makes my heart sick. Then I see the Seven Houses, the Danube, the Leopoldsberg, the Kahlenberg and the Hermannskogel. People in Vienna, too, are not like other people. But it's no use being homesick. I could never do anything in Vienna. I cannot write you my address, because I never stay long in one place.

Dear Parents, I often think of you. I have grown older and more sensible. I wish I had enough money for you, dear Father and Mother, not to have to work any more. If I had enough money I would buy you a little house in Grinzing or Sievering or Kahlenbergerdörfl where you could sit in front of the door in summer and look at all the fine things. I must save up and become independent, then I will be able to help you.

How are you? I hope you are quite well? How are Milli and Rosa? Are they married yet? Where is Adolf now? Is dear little Mitzi still at home? Please give my kind regards to Herr Höllriegel and Fräulein Loisi.

I am sending you in this letter twenty English pound-notes, that is one-hundred-and-twenty guilder. When I earn more I will send you some more.

Now God bless all of you. When I have time I will write again. Best wishes to all.

Your son, Hartl.

Please give Rosl Stollhof my best wishes. Also best wishes to any other friends in the Seven Houses.
I will also write to Herr Höllriegel.

"Yes, now I can read it! This is English money! Here it is—twenty pounds sterling!" Mitzi interrupted the silence that had fallen after the reading of the letter.

Hartl's words had put Frau Gürtler's heart in a flutter. The tears ran down her sunken cheeks, upon which grief had laid its mark, covering them with lines of care. Now the lad had written, written, too, to his father, not knowing that he had been already laid to rest.

"Heaven, Hartl doesn't even know that father's dead! What a shame! Won't his conscience prick him a bit?"

The mother thought otherwise, she did not condemn her child. Hartl was not wicked, but inexperienced. He did not realize what sorrow he had brought on his family by leaving them for years without news of him. He was a foolish, adventure-loving lad, without stability, but he was certainly not bad.

Rosl Stollhof was beside herself when she read that Hartl has sent her his wishes. Behind the cold, superficial words she saw a warm confession of love. He had added an extra line for her alone.

Mitzi was now growing jealous again, and tried to put a damper on Rosl's delight, but the latter was not in the least disturbed. She said to herself that in a letter to his parents Hartl couldn't possibly have sent love and kisses to her. She was quite satisfied with the couple of words she'd got. She was firmly convinced that Hartl Gürtler belonged to her, and neither words nor objections should deprive her of this belief. Some time the day would come, perhaps not long hence, when all this sorrow would belong to the past, and she would be joined eternally to her beloved.

Rosl sat in her room till midnight writing to Hartl. She had written hundreds of such letters, all of which lay in her chest of drawers, ranged in order of date. Some day she would be able to show them to her beloved, and he would read them and know how she had thought of him each single hour, and patiently awaited his return. "Yes," she read, "they could beat me, or tear out my tongue; it would not prevent me from calling out your

name, Hartl, my love. I belong to you and you only. No other man will ever exist for me. I shall love you eternally, and I am sure, beloved, that your heart beats only for me."

Rosl shut the booklet "How to write Love Letters", which she had bought, and put away this letter with the others. The loving girl knelt before her bed, folded her hands, and invoked the Mother of God: "Holy Mary, Heavenly Mother. Protect my Hartl: let him look on no other girl, but bring his thoughts always back to me. Mother of God, let all other girls be like dirt in his eyes, and preserve him for me. Amen."

As she lay in bed she reflected that there would be only black women and girls there where Hartl now was, and that he'd never fall in love with "the likes of them". She whispered to herself: "Well, I'd never have thought it, that the black heathen niggers have their circus, too. It must look funny to see rows of niggers gaping there. I'll make Hartl tell me about it some time."

She turned on her side. In the other bed her mother lay in a heavy sleep procured by the narcotic drugs which she took to rid her of her awful pains for a time. Her pale thin face, with the pointed nose, had the appearance of death. "If only Hartl could get rich," thought Rosl, "so that he could send both our mothers into the country where they wouldn't have to work any more."

With her left hand under her cheek Rosl looked out of the window. The dawn was already grey in the sky, and in the street below the vegetable carts rattled their way to the market. Somebody was whistling the tune of "Drahrer". Probably it was Karl Pschick, the chap who wouldn't leave her any peace, nor accept the fact that she only cared for Hartl and wanted to have nothing to do with other men.

Over towards Heiligenstadt a train was puffing out of the Francis Joseph station. In the still morning its clatter came distinctly to the ear. Rosl sank into a happy sleep, whispering to herself: "Some day I'll get on a train like that and go and find my Hartl."

Marvellous tales were now told in the Seven Houses about the Gürtlers. The boy Hartl, it was said, had become a millionaire in America, where he had a huge property and lived like a Crœsus. At the "Cluster of

Grapes", over drinks, the tale of the Croesus of the Seven Houses grew to incredible dimensions.

"Why," said Anton Patzer, "he's got his own Church." With a gulp he emptied off his Danzig water and rum, screwed up his face, and shook himself as though his insides were on fire. Then he went on: "He has his own Bishop to say Mass to him the whole day."

"And the stuff he has to eat!" interpolated Pepi Hacker, while a drop fell from his nose into his teacup. "Why as soon as he wakes, the cook comes along with a whole plate of stew. He's got his own cellarer, too, with barrels and bottles of drink. Yes, my boy, he's got a brandy there that goes on burning you after you've got rid of it."

"Can he always help himself to as much as he wants of it?" asked Rudl Lenbacher.

"You bet," replied Pepi Hacker. "The whole day long he helps himself in turn—it's never the same drink twice. First he takes it red, then yellow, then green, then black."

"You liar," said hunchbacked Hruby. "There's no such thing as black snaps. It's all tales, what Pepi Hacker says."

"Now then you damned Bohemian, it's a long time since I gave you a thrashing. If you call me a liar, I'll iron out your hump with a hot iron."

"Do what you like with my hump. I'm not a Bohemian, I'm a regular Viennese, with everything in order."

"That's the worst of our imperial city, all you damned Bohemians make yourselves at home here, with everything in order. Well, you just let me go on telling you about the Gürtler boy. He's having a railway line built for himself, but it's not quite ready, otherwise he'd be back here by now."

"Now it's time you stopped these lies," Hans Briendl shouted. "Are you going to tell us you can travel by train across the ocean?"

In House No. 1, at "Adam Wirt", at the corner of Hofergasse, there was talk of Hartl among the regular customers.

"Think of a fool like that making his way all over the world," meditated Poppenberger, taking his pipe out of his mouth and spitting on Egolf's wooden clogs. "Even in India, he's been."

"Wonder he's not afraid of being eaten," said old Pschick. "D'you suppose they have ham sandwiches, and hot sausages there in the theatre?"

"Of course they do," said Peterl Neier, rubbing his nose with his blue overall, so that his sly grin shouldn't be seen. "They get the ham from the old women and the sausages from young girls. Every Friday they cut a bit off, and cook it, just like pig-flesh."

"Who'd ever thought," said Stummerer, "that the young sniveller that was always knocking in my hot-bed windows, would get so rich? I'll let him know when he comes back. There's still three panes he's got to pay, which my wife forgot to charge him for. He'll have to pay when he comes back."

"He's sent a hundred pounds back to his mother," shouted Motzl Zinner from another table.

"There aren't any more pounds," answered Nowak the shopkeeper. "They've been abolished long ago. Now we have kilos instead. He must have sent his mother fifty kilos."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IN Ladysmith, Hartl received a present of fifty pounds from Mr. Philadelphia. The young man had worked out a number of new ideas and had been able to convince his chief that the elephants were capable of the seemingly difficult tricks.

When Hartl was allowed to try out some of his tricks with the elephants in the trainer's presence, and had after quite a short time succeeded in teaching the animals what had seemed almost impossible, the joy of the master and his assistant was great.

Hartl worked the greater part of the day. For months he had suffered from continuous home-sickness, bringing sleepless nights and often fits of weeping. Vienna flitted before his eyes. Vienna and the mountains, Vienna and the Seven Houses, Vienna and his parents, Vienna and Mitzi. Very, very often did he think of little Mitzi. He wondered at this and could find no explanation. Rosl hardly ever entered his thoughts.

Among the circus artistes there was the Domanski

troupe of contortionists—father, mother, two daughters, and an adopted pupil, Bella.

Bella was small and graceful, everyone took her for a mere child although she was actually seventeen. Domanski's two daughters, Harriet and Cora, were very strictly brought-up maidens. In this they were typical of artistes' families.

All three girls fell in love with Hartl. Each kept her secret to herself and each betrayed herself daily and hourly whenever Hartl crossed her path.

If the young man was rehearsing in the morning, they would sit near to him and rivet their eyes on him.

The Mexican husband and wife, Los Esmeraldos, had been for years with Richard's, and were at home in all tricks of the circus. Juanita Esmeraldos, a woman in the middle thirties, rode in a variety of fashions: "panel", bareback, vaulting jockey-wise and "high school". Man and wife juggled on horseback and the summit of their performance was reached with the knife-throwing trick.

A "panel" was laid on the back of a large and heavy horse and a screen was placed at the farther end. With outstretched arms stood Señora Esmeraldos, her back to the screen while the horse galloped at a good pace round the ring. At some distance followed Señor Esmeraldos on another—unsaddled—horse. In his hand he held a number of sharp pointed daggers.

Breathless silence reigned in the house. The orchestra ceased playing and the periodic sound of the horses' hoofs on the wooden stage was all that broke the stillness.

With smiling face Señora Esmeraldos looked at her husband as he lifted a dagger, aimed quickly and then threw it. The shining steel pierced the screen just by her shoulder and remained there quivering.

Dagger after dagger flew by, missing the woman's body only by a hair'sbreadth and sticking into the wood, until head, neck and bust were completely framed. It was a veritable game with death.

Señora Esmeraldos had been married for seventeen years. She might have been Hartl's mother. In all the years of her marriage no thought of infidelity had entered the beautiful Mexican's head. Only since Richard Gürtler had joined Richard's Circus all was up with the woman's peace of mind. At first she had only looked at the boy

and been angry with herself to find it made her blush; and yet she had to look again. To begin with she was not quite clear about her emotions. Something always drew her wherever Hartl might be. The elephants' quarters were in an outlying tent. Juanita would often go into this tent and try to inveigle the silent keeper into conversation. Hartl answered politely to all her questions.

The beautiful Mexican soon had to confess to herself that she was in love with the young man. She tried to laugh herself out of it, fought her rising desire and determined to avoid the elephant tent and to remain in her dressing-room during the animals' performance. But the resolution remained a resolution. For two hours she forced herself to remain in her own quarters determined not to think of Hartl; it was in vain. She ran like one possessed round the little room, began to read, threw herself on the bed, jumped up again and stood before her glass. Her eyes were filled with a shining light; between her bright red lips, half-opened, were two rows of faultless teeth.

Juanita cursed herself and spat at the reflection in the glass. She reproached herself bitterly, ridiculed this senseless desire, tidied her hair and left the caravan no longer mistress of herself.

She went straight to the elephant tent. Hartl lay in his hammock near Soliman. He had a book in his hand and the great elephant was rocking the hammock with his trunk.

For some time Juanita stood there and her blood rose hot in her veins. Confused thoughts danced in her head. What was she doing here? What did she, the woman of thirty-five, want with this youth? She stood rooted to the spot, her burning eyes riveted on the boy in the hammock.

Hartl became uneasy, he dropped his book, turned his head towards the entrance, saw Juanita and made as if to move out of the hammock. A few quick steps brought the beautiful woman to his side.

"Stay here, Señor, I won't disturb you, you have worked hard to-day and must be tired."

Her glowing eyes stared unceasingly into Hartl's face. He had swung himself out of the hammock and pushed Soliman's trunk, which was fumbling inquisitively in the woman's hair to one side.

With a sudden impulse Juanita pulled Hartl's head towards her and pressed her hot lips on his mouth, her trembling body close to his, and whispering:

"Amante, amante, mio amante." She loosed Hartl and fled from the tent.

The youth, overwhelmed, stared at the tent-opening. His lips burned, his ruddy face was quite white. He raised his hand and with his forefinger gently touched his mouth. A shiver went over his body.

Juanita crept often into Hartl's tent, she met him in secret places. He had fallen completely under her spell, had tasted of the tree of knowledge and clung to the hot-blooded woman with the passionate love of an inexperienced boy. She was insatiable in her demands and played with the honour and lives of both.

Nobody in the circus, with the exception of Bella, knew of the love of Juanita and Hartl. This young girl suffered terrible pangs of jealousy. Her little heart experienced both a spiritual and a physical pain. Often she thought of betraying them to Juanita's husband. She refrained from doing so because she was aware of the Mexican's temperament and was afraid that he might throw one of his sharp daggers at Hartl and kill him.

Cora and Harriet noticed Hartl's changed demeanour. They did not know how to explain it and each independently of the other determined to watch the object of their secret passion.

Harriet, the more passionate, had only a few days ago received a box on the ears from her stern father who had discovered her in the act of writing a love-letter. The letter contained no name, being addressed merely to "dearly beloved". In spite of the blow the girl would not admit for whom the letter was intended.

Cora was cleverer. She scribbled little notes full of warm avowals and deposited them in Hartl's rehearsing overall while the elephant number was in progress and the animal tent was empty.

Both sisters continually watched Bella in order to discover why she hurried through with her dressing and immediately left the van. They crept after Bella, saw her standing at the entrance to the ring and staring fixedly at Hartl. After a few days the girls were quite sure.

Juanita grew more impudent day by day. She was

possessed by a love fever that knew no bounds. Hartl clung to the woman believing that he could not live without her, not knowing that it was only his awakened senses that drew him to her. He forgot all else around him and so it was inevitable that one day Bella looked out from a hidden spot and saw the lovers kissing one another. The girl thought that she would die of distress. The seventeen-year-old could not understand how Juanita, a married woman, could thus embrace the young man. Mrs. Domanski had never kissed another man, and Bella had never seen any of the other wives in the troupe do any such thing.

From afar she observed Hartl. When he came near to her she looked slyly at his mouth. She quite believed that she would see the marks of that long kiss. Her mind ran on thoughts of suicide, for hours she lay awake in bed and bit into the pillows so that no one should hear her sobs.

The Domanski sisters not only spied on their little foster-sister Bella, but also on Hartl. Cora saw her secret beloved take a note of glowing love-confessions that she had slipped in his pocket. Her face shone when she saw how his eyes lit up. Her joy, however, was soon damped, when from her hiding-place she observed Juanita approach Hartl, look anxiously around her and then feverishly embrace him, while Hartl returned the woman's hot kisses and showed her the note. Now Cora heard the Mexican break out in ugly swear-words and angrily reproach the young man with infidelity. He defended himself explaining that he had thought that it was Juanita who had put the letter in his pocket.

Juanita furiously tore up the piece of paper, embraced Hartl and drew him into the dark of the dressing-tent.

Cora's love dream was brutally destroyed, dragged in the mud, desecrated. Hate, bitter deep hate took possession of her. All her better feelings were stifled by jealousy. Harriet was indignant when her sister told her of the love scene she had witnessed. Cora wisely refrained from mentioning the history of her little note.

Harriet, too, was disappointed in her love for Hartl. The sisters considered what line they should take. They did not guess that Bella was secretly listening to their conversation.

"I've got it. I know what we'll do," said Cora. "We'll keep a watch on them and when they think that they're quite safe you'll go and tell the Mexican."

Bella listened. Horrified, she raised herself on the cushions in order to hear better.

Harriet hesitated before answering. Cora went on: "She's a married woman. It's disgusting that a woman old enough to be his mother should behave like that."

"Don't you think that the deceived husband might do something to the young man? You know how revengeful these Mexicans are, and Esmeraldo is a fine one with daggers."

"Serve him right whatever happens," answered the spiteful Cora.

For days Bella went about with a great fear in her heart. She wanted to warn Hartl, but did not dare to speak to him about it. Often she found herself on the way to the elephant tent, but each time she lost her courage when she found herself at the tent-opening.

Hartl himself had no idea either of the love or of the hate of the three girls. He lived as though in a delirium. Every minute of the day he yearned for Juanita's company. He often neglected his work, standing before his tent, his eyes straining to catch a sight of his beloved. Juanita grew ever more audacious. When the troupe gave a performance in Johannesburg the woman, crazy with passion, hired a little room on the outskirts of the town where she could meet her lover.

Juanita lost all caution, she continually made excuses for leaving the circus for a few hours. Her husband was practising a new and complicated trick. For this he had secured the permission of the manager to use the ring in the early part of the afternoon.

The South African sun shone scorchingly down on to the streets of Johannesburg. It was the afternoon when all who could remained in the shade of their own homes. Human beings and animals alike suffered from the terrible heat.

Mounted on a Mexican silver-plated saddle Juanita rode the broad-backed circus-nag and trotted through the empty streets. The Stock Exchange quarter still showed signs of life. The London exchange rates always arrived in the afternoon, the bank-clerks had to collect all

telegraphed news of business importance and convey it to their offices.

The lovely Mexican, like everything else belonging to the circus, caused a great sensation in this town that had no other amusements. As she passed by the Bourse, everyone gazed at her. A hundred paces behind Juanita followed Cora on a bicycle. She kept some way behind her prey and when the latter turned into a side-street she peddled quickly after her so as not to lose the scent.

On the edge of the town, on the Krugersdorp Road, stood an isolated little hotel. Gold-mining inspectors and officials used it during an inspection.

Juanita had chosen this for her trysting-place with Hartl. Here she thought there was nobody who knew them and she believed there was no possibility of their being discovered.

From behind a big rubbish-heap Cora watched Juanita turn her horse into the courtyard. She waited for a long time. She wanted to see the elephant-keeper. After an hour had passed the Mexican rode out of the yard and passed by the spying girl. Immediately after Hartl left on his bicycle and turned into a side-street.

That very evening Señor Esmeraldo found a note under the make-up box in his dressing-room, informing him that his wife was betraying him and was meeting another man in a hotel in the Krugersdorp Road.

Harriet reproached Cora when the latter told what she had discovered and that the husband now knew of his wife's infidelity. The sisters had cast all prudence aside, and did not know that Bella was in the room next to them and could hear them quarrelling. Her heart seemed to stand still; she knew the vindictiveness of the Mexicans. Once before a couple of them had fought with knives, and one of them had been left dead.

For hours Bella pondered whether she should tell Hartl or the woman. During the performance she stood at the entrance to the ring, expecting every moment to see Señor Esmeraldo attack Hartl. Nothing of the sort happened. While the elephant number was in progress and Hartl helped Mr. Philadelphia, Juanita leaned against the wall of the opposite entrance and watched the performance. Her husband was not to be seen. Bella's eyes wandered

over the rows of seats. Perhaps the Mexican was there with his dagger ready.

Harriet and Cora, already regretting their treachery, hung about nervously, and clung together when amid deathly silence the Esmeraldo number began. They were frightened and horror-stricken. Cora stuck her finger-nail into her sister's hand. They believed that the deceived husband would revenge himself and throw one of his sharp knives into his wife's heart.

Nothing happened. The Esmeraldo number ended as usual. Cora hoped that the Mexican had not found the letter. Later she slipped into the dressing-room and lifted the make-up box. The note was no longer there.

Bella did not sleep that night. All night she racked her brains how she could stave off the harm that Cora had done.

The following afternoon three maidenly hearts were pounding in a deathly anxiety. They had seen Señor Esmeraldo make preparations for his daily rehearsal. Bella, unseen by the others, crept to the elephant tent. She could hear the sound of voices. Something unusual seemed to be up. The second keeper appeared at the entrance wiping the sweat from his brows. Bella questioned him.

"Soliman has suddenly fallen sick. Hartl is inside, I must call Mr. Philadelphia at once."

Bella drew a long breath. If one of the elephants were ill then certainly Hartl could not get away. She hurried back through the tent-lined paths and saw Juanita on her horse riding along the street.

The Mexican in the ring suddenly collected his belongings together and to their horror Cora and Harriet saw him shortly after lead his horse out of its stall, vault on to the saddle and ride away.

Cora was in despair and wanted to follow with her bicycle and warn Juanita. Then the sisters saw Hartl in his white overall come out of the cooking-tent with a bucket of water and go towards the elephants. The girls breathed again. If the Mexican did not find Hartl in the hotel on the road all was saved. Perhaps Señora Juanita would think of some good excuse when her husband surprised her in the hotel. Certainly she would never betray her lover.

Bella awaited in the burning sun Juanita's return. The woman's face was gloomy and distorted, she went straight to the elephant tent. She looked at it for a minute and then went quickly away. Her features composed themselves. She had discovered the reason for Hartl's non-appearance.

Shortly after Bella saw the husband return. His lips were pressed together and he shoved his horse with a blow into the tent.

Bella now knew that the deceived husband had spied on his wife and had probably discovered that she had been meeting a man there. The girl was soon quite certain of this, by the way in which Esmeraldo, thinking he was unobserved, followed the steps of his wife with wide-open eyes as she paced up and down in front of the elephant tent. He had jumped to a wrong conclusion, thinking that his wife's lover was Philadelphia, and not understanding why Juanita should deceive him with so old a man. His whole being was set on revenge, instinctively, almost mechanically, he made with his hand the movement of his dagger-throwing trick.

Before the beginning of the performance Bella took heart and slipped into the elephant tent. She found Hartl standing beside Soliman and stroking his trunk, and still feeling rather timid she took her courage in both hands and went up to the man she secretly loved.

"You must take care," she said. "You are in great danger."

Hartl turned round in surprise. "Oh, dear Miss Bella, Soliman is a good beast, he won't do me any harm."

"No, no, I don't mean that. You must, you must be very careful with Señor Esmeraldo!"

Hartl looked round in alarm. Bella's eyes were turned to the ground. He seized her arm.

"Miss Bella, what do you mean?"

"You know why. He rode after her to-day. Be very careful."

Bella freed herself and ran out of the tent.

Hartl started to follow her, but then remained in his tent staring in front of him in dismay. He pulled himself together, threw off his overall and went to find Juanita.

As he passed by the Mexican couple's van for the second time, Señor Esmeraldo came up to him. He looked Hartl up and down and followed him with his eyes.

The Mexican looked after the young man. Could it be? His wife could hardly prefer this silly youth to him. He pondered over and over again who it could be. At the hotel on the Krugersdorp Road they had given him no information. Woe to him, and woe to her! He wanted to unravel the affair and then take a terrible revenge. And again he made the movement of throwing the dagger.

Hartl's anxiety increased the nearer the evening came. Shortly before the performance he saw Bella and urged her to speak further. Now she confessed everything to him. Her eyes looked out at him through tears. Cora went by. Hartl seized her arm and forced her to stand still.

"Miss Cora, what have you done? What have you said? That I met Señora Juanita in a hotel? How can you say such a thing, and why did you write to Señor Esmeraldo? Tell me?"

Cora looked at him with frightened eyes. Her lips moved as though imploring for pardon. She wanted to speak, opened her lips, and burst into tears.

Hartl began to understand. He remembered olden days. Rosl Stollhof used to look at him in just this way. And now he remembered, too, that little Mitzi had stared at him with large anxious eyes. Now he had it: the girls were in love. His conscience was clear, however, he had done nothing, absolutely nothing, to encourage the poor things again. A vision of little Mitzi flitted before his eyes.

Cora wrenched herself free from Hartl's hand and ran away, even from some way off her sobs were still audible.

Juanita had vainly tried to speak to Hartl, her husband never left her side. She, however, harboured no suspicions, attributing the constant presence of her husband to chance.

As she was going from the dressing-tent to the ring her husband was stopped by the Director at the stable-entrance. At the ring-entrance Juanita suddenly felt someone shove a piece of paper into her hand. She turned round quickly and saw the Domanskis' little Bella hurrying round the corner of the stable-entrance; at the same moment Hartl passed by and whispered:

"*Cautela, tuyo esposo conocer todas!*" ("Be careful, your husband knows all.")

Juanita shivered. Her body was aglow with terror. She had to support herself against the barrier.

Hartl turned, he stood at her side and said in a low tone: "*No se temeroso.*" ("Don't be afraid.")

At this moment the husband appeared. Again he looked inquiringly at Hartl. Smiling, he approached Juanita and laid his hand on her arm. She jumped violently and trembled at his touch. He laughed:

"What's wrong with you? Has something stung you?"

In the ring a horse performance was in progress. The crack of the whips made Juanita's flesh creep. With terrified eyes whe watched her husband who was arranging his gleaming daggers. One of the knives slipped out of his hand and buried and fell, point foremost, into the sand. To the frightened woman it seemed as though the pointed knife had pierced her heart.

A thunder of applause came from outside, the horses, their work finished, galloped through the doorway, shaking the plumes on their beautiful heads and nodding as though they would say: "Good. Very Good. We've done enough for to-day."

Juanita's horse was led by. The stableboy stood by it and fixed the upright board on its back.

Juanita breathed heavily. The warning bell sounded and the orchestra struck up a waltz. The boy made a stirrup of his clasped hands, and with a deep sigh the performer put her foot on them and in a moment was seated in the saddle. Two stable-men drew back the curtain that hung in the entrance to the ring, and Juanita galloped her horse into the ring. The horse galloped twice round the course and then Esmeraldo appeared standing on his steed. He stood bolt upright on his steed and before him was the hoof-shaped stand stuck, like a pin-cushion, with knives.

With a final crash the music stopped. Both horses stood still.

An announcer stepped into the ring and warned the public of the dangerous quality of the next turn, he begged for absolute silence as if either Señor Esmeraldo or the horses were distracted in any way Juanita's life would be in danger. The least movement might cause one of the pointed knives to miss its course and pierce the woman's body.

Juanita stood up, her back to the wooden board, she

stretched out her arms. The horse first trotted, then galloped round the ring.

"*Pronto?*" shouted the man.

"*Ya, pronto!*" replied the woman.

Juanita's beautiful figure clad in flesh-coloured tights was outlined sharply against the black screen.

Esmeraldo juggled first with three and then with five knives. The sound of the hoofs rang out on the wooden floor.

Leaning against the railings at the entrance-door was Hartl. His eyes never left the lovely rider. An inner voice told him to keep guard.

Juanita's eyes roamed questioningly round. She was looking for Hartl. When she found him her mouth twitched slightly. Esmeraldo, who was watching his wife, observed the direction of her glance. He saw Hartl and was now certain that it was with this boy that his wife was betraying him.

"*Atencion!*" called Esmeraldo and threw the first knife.

It whistled through the air and buried itself in the wood above the woman's right shoulder. Knife after knife followed. Soon her arms and head were completely encircled by gleaming daggers.

Esmeraldo selected two sharp sword-like knives. They were destined to pierce the wood on either side of Juanita's breasts. The Mexican threw the knives into the air and caught them again. Now he trotted near to Hartl and a nasty smile played about his lips. The young Viennese knew in this moment that the man intended to commit a crime. Juanita also had observed the look and she gazed imploringly at Hartl as she rode by. The first dagger flew through the air and stuck into the wood by her right breast, where it remained quivering and shining in the light. Esmeraldo lifted the second dagger and took careful aim, his features were distorted and his white teeth gleamed between his drawn-back lips. He looked at the woman as she trotted by, with hatred in his eyes. Again he lifted his hand.

With a sudden impulse Hartl jumped from his seat, rushed across the ring to Juanita's horse and tore her from it as the dagger whistled through the air.

The audience screamed. Three clear girlish voices sounded above all. Soon a panic set in.

The second knife had pierced the board close to the middle; had Hartl not torn Juanita from the horse it would have pierced her heart.

Stupefied the young woman lay in the sand. Hartl raised her and in the same moment Esmeraldo slipped from the back of his horse and ran off the ring.

The audience did not know what had happened. Stablemen dragged the almost unconscious woman from the ring.

The audience now saw that the last dagger had been thrown too much to the centre. It was clear now that the young man who had dragged the woman from her horse had saved her life.

Great commotion reigned amongst the circus folk. The Domanski turn had to be missed because two of the girls were in hysterics.

Esmeraldo was generally execrated.

In the night Hartl heard something rustling, but he paid no attention. Next morning he discovered a slender knife stuck into the tent-pole, close to his head.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

ONCE again Puppy, the little fox-terrier bitch, had the joy of monopolizing her master's love.

After the circus had given performances in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the whole show took ship in Durban Harbour for India.

Juanita had disappeared from Johannesburg the day after her husband had attempted to take her life.

Hartl ran all round the town to find his mistress. He went to the little love-nest in the Krugersdorp Road, but could find no trace of Juanita.

He thought that he would die. Life without his beloved seemed impossible. Everyone warned him of Esmeraldo, saying that the Mexican would not leave his honour unavenged.

The youth defended the woman, swearing that all rumours of a relationship between Juanita and himself were lies. He did not realize that he betrayed himself by his very eagerness.

The third night after the scene in the ring Esmeraldo again entered Hartl's tent. Puppy, who lay under the clothes near to Hartl in the hammock, growled gently.

The young man was in a deep sleep and when the bitch's growl awakened him he pulled her close and murmured:

"Hush, Puppy, be quiet, Master wants to sleep."

The Mexican slunk in on tiptoes. This time he meant to accomplish his goal, he was not going to throw his dagger, but stick it with his own hand into the breast of the paramour of his faithless wife.

Step by step Esmeraldo approached the hammock. Soliman moved from one foot to another, his chain rattled slightly, the elephant turned his head a little to one side, stretched out his ears and emitted a little snort.

Nearer and nearer crept the husband intent upon avenging his honour. It never occurred to him that this young and inexperienced youth might have been the seduced rather than the seducer. When he was quite close to the hammock and had lifted his knife, in order to plunge it into Hartl's neck, he received a blow from Soliman's trunk that hurled him out through the tent entrance.

The following evening, after the performance, the circus broke up and travelled to Pietermaritzburg.

Juanita continued to absent herself.

At first Hartl determined to stay in the town and look for his beloved. Mr. Philadelphia, who up to now had said nothing to his assistant, called Hartl to him when he heard of his decision to stay behind and read him a lecture on the lines of Leviticus. Was he not ashamed to run after a married woman like this, a woman almost old enough to be his mother? Had he forgotten all his plans for conducting a big animal number himself in the future? What would he do in Johannesburg when his money came to an end?

Hartl left a letter for Juanita in the little hotel on the Krugersdorp Road in case she happened to return there. For days the love-sick youth ate nothing. During his free hours he sat in the elephant-tent and brooded. Puppy would creep near to him, putting her nose into his hand as it hung loosely down, standing up against his knee and looking at her unhappy master with her true eyes. She seemed to be imploring him, saying: "Dear Master, don't be so sad, I am still here, forget the woman who herself left you."

As the ship steamed across the Indian Ocean, Hartl's sufferings began to abate during the long days of leisure. Often he was still seized with longing for the woman who had first initiated him into the mysteries of physical love

and who had made him believe that this was what human love meant. He was overcome by powerless fury when his grief took possession of him, and tears streamed from his eyes. He would be ashamed of himself and creep into his cabin.

Bella, Harriet and Cora did not dare to go near to Hartl. Hidden behind airshafts, rolls of rope and lifeboats, they would watch the melancholy boy who avoided companionship and sought solitude alone with his pet.

The three girls suffered for and with Hartl; they would have loved to have spoken some words of comfort, but maidenly shyness and the purity of their love held them back.

The peaceful days of the voyage to Ceylon exercised a quieting influence on the love-sick young man. Smooth as a mirror lay the Indian Ocean in the sunlight. The warm air lulled his thoughts and even the sea breezes brought no coolness.

In Colombo, Hartl threw himself into his work. Women and girls did not exist for him. Day by day Juanita came less into his thoughts, only sometimes in dreams did she appear before him. The remembrance of her grew fainter and fainter.

From Madras, Hartl sent another ten pounds to his mother. He wrote shortly and begged his mother that she and his father might not be angry with him for writing so seldom and sending no address, but he wanted to wait until he became a great man.

He was seized by terrible homesickness when he wrote this letter. Vienna, dear Vienna was ever before his eyes. "Vienna, my beautiful Vienna," he murmured, as he passed through the evil-smelling harbour quarter of Madras accompanied by Soliman who had two gigantic placards dangling from either side. His eye took note of the exotic mingled crowd, but underneath his superficial interest his heart was cold, and nothing could warm it. The madly-hopping dervishes who danced with shrill ear-piercing cries until they dropped to the ground, the rickshaws with their human loads, the Malayan prostitutes with their pierced nostrils upon whom vice had laid its inevitable marks, the magnificent buildings standing next door to crumbling and crumbled barracks—none of these could replace the brightness of his mother-city.

The Temple of Buddha in Victoria Street was wonderful,

its white marble shone and the sunrays broke against it. The believers prostrated themselves in front of it, for it was a high feast day.

Hartl thought of the niche with the tiny Mother of God and the Baby Jesus in the little low sausage-house in the Klosterneuburger Strasse. He remembered how the people crossed themselves as they passed it, remembered how Kathi Maier while making the sign of the cross and saying "In the name of the Father" would always throw a glance into the window of the sausage-house in order to see what clothes Katl had on.

Another niche came to Hartl's mind. At the corner of the Alserstrasse and the Schlösselgasse, opposite the Public Hospital, there stood a Minorite Church of the Holy Trinity. On the corner of the Schlosselgasse there was a deep niche in which saints, pictures and vases were grouped round a miniature altar. Before the niche there was a grating and the pious used to throw small coins, sometimes even as much as a sixpence, through the wire into the alcove.

Hartl and his friends often found themselves in need of money, but one of the boys always had some lime and a couple of hooks. A pilgrimage to the Alserstrasse became necessary. Two "pious youths" knelt before the alcove described above—and one of these was always Hartl—while two or three older boys remained behind, their hands folded as though in prayer, their eyes keeping guard. While they prayed the two in front would fish with their sticky hooks.

"Dear St. Aloysius," prayed Hartl, "let me reach that penny and then that threepence. Good Theresa, I will give you a candle and a penny if you help me to get that sixpence and those threepenny-pieces."

The saints never objected. As behoves holy people they had good hearts and were not avaricious over pennies, threepennies and sixpences, they only just saved their good names by keeping their eyes turned upwards. Only St. Francis, whose noble picture hung on the right wall, looked suspicious. With his right eye he looked up to the roof where there was a penitent Magdalen and with the left he watched the money on the ground.

Loisl Fasching who was among the band of brigands was much disturbed by St. Francis. He procured a candle, begged that he might be allowed to fix it himself, gained

the priest's benediction at the same time as his consent, placed the candle so insecurely on the altar that the whole chapel almost caught on fire and afterwards a florin and thirty-eight farthings were found sticking to the lime-covered soles of his shoes.

When Hartl thought of these adventures, over which neither he nor his companions ever suffered any qualms of conscience, he had to laugh out loud. What splendid days those had been!

His thoughts carried him ever further into the past and old memories awoke anew. The goodness and sweetness of his sisters, their great devotion and love for their mother. They did not involve themselves in love affairs, their mother was everything to them. How badly he had treated his parents! He had given them so much worry, had brought them more sorrow than all their other children put together. He wanted to make it up to them, to repay all their goodness, to make their declining years happy, Then he thought of little Mitzi, who must be quite a big girl by now. She, too, was good to her parents, who were very fond of her. He seemed to see Mitzi's dear face in front of him, her beseeching eyes looking into his. Had this child really been in love with him? Her expression had been the same as that which he had seen in the eyes of Bella and Cora, it was the expression of love, the love of pure girls. Then the image of Rosl came before him. She had been his sweetheart. But how different from Juanita, how different from Bella, Harriet and Cora. Rosl Stollhof was independent. She had simply taken possession of him and there had been no more to be said. But now he saw clearly that he did not love Rosl, that he did not in fact love any woman. He was free from all that for ever. Juanita had been the first to lay him in bondage, she would also be the last.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

YEAR after year passed. The Richard's Circus visited India, China, Japan, Australia. The great islands, Oceania and New Zealand. The performers lived, ate, slept, worked, quarrelled and loved year after year

and day after day, like a great family of relations of every degree. But death meanwhile had made gaps in the ranks. The fearful climate of many pestilent districts, and epidemics as well, had charged their toll.

Little Bella was the victim of consumption. The Domanski couple did all that was humanely possible for the child they had adopted, and come to love. But all their efforts were vain. Bella had lost the will to live. She wished to die. For three years she had stored up her love for the Viennese as a precious jewel in her heart. She supposed that Hartl did not even guess she loved him, and made up her mind not to reveal the fact. She thought it would be fine to be able to die young and not suffer any more disillusions. She had nobody in the world, and knew that she would never love another man.

With horror Hartl saw the girl from day to day approaching the grave. He longed for her to recover, and every night in his hammock, he folded his hands and prayed Heaven to restore Bella to health.

Puppy, as though she knew that she was bringing a last precious comfort to a poor human child doomed to death, frequently, when her master was at work, came to find Bella in some shady spot where they had put her out on a deck chair. The little dog stretched down beside the invalid, laid its head on her leg, and gazed up at the girl with large faithful eyes. If Bella stroked its silky hair, it would lick her poor hand all over.

The girl then dreamed with open eyes. It seemed to her that the man she secretly loved must feel the caresses she was lavishing on his pet. If she was undisturbed by coughing, she gave herself over altogether to dreams. She thought she was Hartl's wife, that she lived for him alone, preparing his meals, washing his clothes and standing near him when he rehearsed with the elephants. She felt his body at her side, and often she stretched her withered hand into the air and kept it there, as though she were pressing his arm. A pleasant smile then lit up her face. Often in the middle of her dreams she was seized by a fearful fit of coughing which threatened to choke her. All the card houses then fell to pieces, all the castles in the air collapsed.

The girl's soul was pure and clean as crystal, without a flaw. Sickness had not succeeded in destroying her child's

nature, but had only matured her suffering being, and developed her mind.

As often as she was not thinking about Hartl, Bella spent her time reading. Often she was overcome by great weakness, when the doctor would forbid any excitement, including the reading of books. Then the members of the troupe would bring illustrated reviews and comic papers. The doctors had long advised her foster-parents to send Bella to some healthy district, and so both to prolong and to improve the conditions of her existence. But the invalid, with tears in her eyes, only asked not to be sent among strangers. She declared she would sooner die than live without her dear parents and sisters. She did not say that she could not bear to be out of Hartl's eyes at her last moment.

Whenever he had leisure, Hartl sat with Puppy at Bella's side, and read out to her from books and newspapers. She only heard his voice, and watched his face, and paid little attention to what he read to her.

In the last two years he had grown up a great deal. He lived only for his ideas and his books. He had forgotten Juanita ; that whole episode lay behind him like a bad dream. Very often he perceived the glances of amorous women, but met them with a cold expression of refusal. He was through with women. He knew that little Bella loved him, he knew that she wanted to die, because he could not return her love ; and he felt guilty, without any cause.

Hartl was not yet twenty, but he was more serious than other boys of that age. He tormented himself with reproaches about the distress he had caused to his parents. Whatever he took in hand, although certainly with no evil intent, turned to unhappiness for others. His parents, his brothers and sisters, lived in Vienna. There, too, lived Rosl Stollhof, and another, a mere child. To all of them he had brought suffering. He had always brought distress to his fellow men. How good, how profoundly good, his mother was ! And what a return he had given for that love ! That dark night he had run away, and for almost six years her heart had bled for her lost child. Now he was reaping condign punishment. He, who had been known in Vienna as Happy Hartl, could no more laugh. He had forgotten how. His father was good at heart, and had always forgiven him his foolish games, had often

laughed at them, and only warned him not to carry matters too far. When his mother had punished him for various pranks by letting him go without his supper, his sisters had secretly brought him tasty morsels. Everybody had been good to him, and he had been ungrateful to all. His brother had often patiently accepted blows as meant for him. Both girls had loved him, certainly they still both loved him and were suffering still for him.

He had injured them all, and never for a moment thought of rewarding them for being so kind to him. Retribution had now come, He had forgotten how to laugh. He was suffering for his bad qualities, and supposed that he must never come into close contact with anybody else, for fear of bringing misery upon them.

His own punishment had certainly begun. For three years he had been travelling with Mr. Philadelphia, and year by year he recognized more fully that he was far from the goal he had set himself. He was well paid, but his savings only carried him inches along the road to success which he had expected to put behind himself on seven-leagued boots. His savings did not suffice to realize a hundredth part of his dreams. Every month he sent half his salary to Vienna, thinking thereby to help in healing the wounds he had caused. This was why his savings grew so slowly ; till at last in quiet despair he said to himself that he would never be in a position to carry out his plans. This was the beginning of his term of penal servitude.

He had on his conscience, moreover, the little girl whose body and face day by day shrunk, as death came nearer. Like Rosl and Mitzi she had fallen in love with him, and, therefore, she was dying. He let this thought sink deep into him, though Madame Domanski had related to him that Bella's mother had died of consumption. Hartl, however, would not be persuaded that Bella, had she not met him, would have lived many, many years. In tragic hours of repentance he made continual resolutions to repair all this damage, so far as in him lay.

But when he looked at Bella, distress overcame him. What if, in Vienna, one of his family were slowly dying of sheer distress. He turned hot and cold all over ; and anguished sweat appeared on his forehead. What if his mother or his father were already dead ? It might be that Rosl and Mitzi, who both loved him, were lying close to

death like Bella. Ah, no! anything rather than that. His father was healthy, but his mother's heart had been affected owing to his running away, or so his Aunt Marie had told him, with her usual malignance. Every time such memories took possession of him he gazed with wide open eyes into the void. He saw his mother struggling with heart disease, in the last stage, while old Doctor Rosenthal, in resignation and despair, shrugged his shoulders. He himself, at that vision, fell in the grip of a fever.

Rosl Stollhof's mother was sick, and Mitzi's mother had died giving birth to a girl. Hartl had a fixed prepossession that the two girls would also die on his account.

He wanted to make reparation, so far as lay in his power. He never sent his address home, being afraid lest in answer he should receive news from Vienna. He wanted to put that off as long as possible. He longed to hear all the news, but the fear of receiving a letter from Vienna which would bring dreadful news induced him to keep silence regarding his whereabouts. Bad news would reach him soon enough, he felt, in any case.

Sometimes his melancholy mood lifted. Then, in imagination, he would pace once more the streets of Vienna, humming Viennese tunes, and forgetting for a while his wretchedness. But thoughts of his native city only deepened his homesickness. When he heard Viennese music it was intolerable. One evening in Rangoon he passed by a large restaurant. A placard drew his attention, with the following large notice:

VIENNESE LADIES' ORCHESTRA
MESSERSCHMIDT AND GRUNER
DAILY CONCERTS
REAL VIENNA MUSIC

His heart was already almost in his mouth when he entered the hall, and gazed as through a mist at a dozen women in white dresses with blue veils round their shoulders on the stage. They were Viennese girls playing Vienna music.

The conductress, a buxom brunette, now rose, with a fiddle in her left hand and a bow in the right. Twice she rapped the stand, lifted the bow a moment, then made three light movements and the violins were off.

Hartl was breathing heavily. He gave a hoarse order

to the waiter, and then started to tremble. What was it that the fiddles were giving out in fine resounding tones? It was Strauss's immortal waltz, "The Blue Danube". Hartl clenched his jaw. He thought his chest would explode. Throwing a rupee on the table, and not waiting for the change he stumbled to the door.

Another time Hartl was sitting by Bella and reading her an anecdote of the witty priest, Father Abraham a Santa Clara, a story full of primitive Vienna humour, not without a vein of coarseness.

"When the good citizens of Vienna looked up to the pulpit, they saw Father Abraham pull back his surplice sleeve, clench his fist, and shake it at the congregation. Mouths, eyes and ears opened wide as the combative priest shouted 'Come on, come on,' the Lord called to the money-changers in the Temple 'come on, if you dare, you scoundrels.' And if anybody doesn't like it he can come and fetch his rent from the pulpit himself. Then all the landlords took to their heels."

Bella looked straight ahead. She was feeling very happy. Puppy's head was under her arm, and Hartl's voice was like music to her. The Vienna dialect seemed twice as charming when he spoke it. If only he could go on talking while she slipped off into an eternal sleep!

But Hartl shut the book quickly. His thoughts had sped thousands of miles away to Vienna itself.

Meanwhile Bella took some volumes of the American *Performers' Gazette*, and ran her eye over the pages. As quite mechanically she turned over one after another, her eye was suddenly caught by an advertisement which she stopped and read. It was the invitation to Hartl to report to an Italian lawyer in Vienna, in order to obtain a legacy which had been left to him.

Bella's eye flew from word to word, from line to line; then she looked back at the title and saw that the number was over two-and-a-half years old.

"Mr. Gürtler," she whispered, and her voice trembled with pain, for now he would certainly leave Mr. Philadelphia and the circus, and she would lose him.

Hartl looked at her. Her cheeks were glowing, and two red spots flamed in her cheeks. "Mr. Gürtler, read that, it must be for you."

Hartl quickly read the announcement, and was even

more amazed than excited. Why should he inherit an Italian legacy? In a flash the answer came—it was from Mr. Chiesi! Again and again he read the words, and then sank into old memories, memories of the time when he was a flying acrobat, a popular star, which crowded in on him. Like a bird he had swooped through the air. What glorious years those had been! So Mr. Chiesi had remembered him after all.

Like Bella, he looked now for the date of issue of the paper. It was two-and-a-half years old, and how long and miserable those years had been! Would the legacy still be waiting there? Would it still be valid? Now he was reaping the fruits of his refusal to send home an address. Was his destiny now at a turning-point? Was he near to attaining his goal? With a quick resolve he arose.

"Please, Miss Bella," he asked, "may I take the paper with me?" She nodded. Her heart was full of fear that now she would lose him.

Hartl paced through the tents until he found Mr. Philadelphia.

The old trainer was astonished and delighted for Hartl's sake. He dismissed the young man's fears that the legacy might already have passed to others, or might at any time pass to them. But he was disturbed by the idea that he might lose his assistant to whom, in three years of relations, he had become much attached. However, his honest conscience told him that the young man could not have remained his assistant for ever; therefore, he did not in the least grudge him his good luck, but rejoiced with him that his situation was now taking a turn for the better, so that possibly he would be able to realize his long-cherished plans.

Not for eleven days did Hartl receive a reply to his telegram. The lawyer to whom the cable had been addressed, nominated executor of Chiesi's will in so far as it concerned Hartl, had long left Vienna and was now attached to the Embassy at Lisbon. Thence came the reply that the money was on deposit at the Ravenna branch of the Banca Nazionale, awaiting Hartl.

For a month he stayed on with Mr. Philadelphia, until the new man had more or less mastered the job. At Adelaide he left Richard's Circus. During the last days he devoted

every free moment to Bella, for an inner voice told him that she would not survive his departure.

For a week, now, he had ceased his work with Mr. Philadelphia. The new man was now doing the job. Hartl only awaited the ship which was to carry him back to Europe.

Bella was dying ; but the cause was no longer consumption so much as her sense that she had fulfilled her mission.

The man she loved was now rich, and her fancy played with notions of millions. He had told her of his ambition to acquire a great menagerie and to train it according to the methods he had been thinking out for years. To her question whether he would marry, he had answered emphatically, "No !" Never in his life did he intend to take that step.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "some day a pretty sweet girl will cross your path. You've still time to be very happy." Each word she spoke was an act of self-torture.

"No, you're quite mistaken. There can be no wife and no joys for me. I bring bad luck to everybody."

"You mustn't talk like that. Some day you'll be very happy. My prayers have been heard."

He did not speak, but sank back into his melancholy. Now that he was perhaps at the goal of his ambitions, he had lost much of his joy and of his energy, and his dreams had faded.

"Will you think of me, Mr. Gürtler, when you've left us ?"

He turned his eyes from her, for he could not bear to see the expression on her face, and found it hard to say a word.

"I shall always think of you and never forget you, Bella." Tears were pouring down his cheeks. She took a handkerchief out of his pocket and dried his tears.

That very night Domanski fetched Hartl from his tent. Bella lay at the point of death and wanted to speak to Hartl once more. Throwing on an overall Hartl followed the old performer, whose eyes were red with tears.

Puppy, with lowered tail, crept after the two men. The animal guessed what was happening. These intelligent quadrupeds understand more about human death than do men themselves. Some mysterious faculty, unknown to men, gives them a sense of the impending death of one dear to them.

In the Domanskis' caravan Harriet and Cora lay on a sofa and pressed their handkerchiefs against their mouths. Mother Domanski sat next the bed and laid vinegar pads over the sick girl's hands and temples. A young doctor stood at the bedside with a syringe.

Bella's eyes already looked into another world. Her breath rattled from her chest. She was quite conscious.

When Hartl entered she turned her head towards the door. A human expression came back into her eyes, they were pleading. He approached her quickly. She shook the vinegar-soaked rags from her emaciated knuckles and held out her hands to him. Puppy jumped on to the bed and crouched beside the dying girl. The doctor would have sent the bitch away, but Bella begged :

"Let her be, she wants to say good-bye."

Hartl knelt beside the bed. He kissed the cold hands. A sigh shook his whole frame.

"Don't, Mr. Gürtler. I'm going to my mother. I am so glad that I was able to help you. God willed that I should look through those old newspapers and find the advertisement."

She was silent, her breathing became more and more difficult. Her fingers clenched themselves tightly in Hartl's hands, her eyes grew misty. Her lips opened, scarcely audibly she said, in English : "You good, good boy, tell me something nice of your home city Vienna, please do ?"

Hartl clenched his teeth, he pressed her hands gently.

"Please, please, Mr. Gürtler."

Hartl leaned over her, his face was very close to hers ; he wanted her to take something precious and beautiful on her long journey, he wanted to tell her about his home. The others in the room clenched their hands, sobs heaved from their breasts.

Hartl began in a low voice :

"Close your eyes, little Bella, I am going to tell you a nice story."

Bella's face lit up, her eyes riveted themselves on Hartl, expressing all her love for him, she pressed his hand against her mouth and her head fell to one side.

Puppy howled loudly.

The doctor took Hartl and the bitch out of the caravan. He had loosed the dead girl's fingers from the hands of the young man.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TWO days later little Bella was buried in the beautiful churchyard of Nordberg in Adelaide. A mighty eucalyptus tree flanked by fan-palms shaded the grave.

Director Richard had shown great honour to the dead girl of whom he had been very fond. The whole circus troupe accompanied the hearse to the Presbyterian Church, the cortège of horses and carriages extended a mile in length. The shrewd manager did not forget that it would be a good advertisement.

In front of the coffin on Soliman's back rode Hartl. His heart was very heavy, he told himself that he had really loved little Bella. He did not realize that it was his sentimental Viennese tenderness that put this belief in his head. Why had Bella died? Why had she died like this in the flower of her youth, at an age when most people were just beginning to live? She had died more from a broken heart than from that scourge of mankind, tuberculosis. He was more than ever convinced that he brought disaster to all who loved him. He determined that in future he would avoid mankind as much as possible and associate only with animals. He determined to be kind to everyone; even when they were unkind to him. He wanted to expatiate his sins.

Wherever the sad procession passed the people stood still, and many uncovered their heads as the open carriage with the white coffin went by. The carriage was adorned with wreaths of brilliantly-coloured tropical flowers with long streamers and inscriptions in all the better known languages of the world that fluttered in the wind.

The circus funeral passed on. The immortal funeral dirges of Chopin and Beethoven, sounded on muffled trumpets, increased the sorrow in Hartl's heart. He had laid an enormous bouquet of white chrysanthemums on the coffin. On a band of silk the words were written, in English:

> An angel went home to Heaven.
> Fare thee well, my darling.

Soliman stepped softly, pausing between each step. This big intelligent beast guessed that his master was going through great suffering. For days he had known that this young man, who meant so much to his grateful

animal heart, was in sorrow. He had taken every opportunity to show his love, continually stroking Hartl's neck and back with his trunk.

Who could know what went on in his animal mind? It will remain an eternal riddle why these enormous primeval animals who were created by a whim of Nature should possess an intelligence and sensitiveness that almost approaches that of man.

In a basket in front of Hartl lay Puppy, the fox-terrier bitch. The animal had not eaten since Bella's death. While the girl's body had been laid in the tent she had lain by its side all day and only at night had she jumped into Hartl's hammock. The young man's sympathy with his pet was great. Often the faithful questioning doggy eyes were raised to his and it seemed as though there were tears in them.

As the grave-digger lowered the coffin into the grave, Puppy, who lay in Hartl's arms, emitted a gentle wail. Did the beast know that a pure-hearted human being was buried here? Did she know that a soul her master had loved had flown up to Heaven?

How much men can learn from animals if they study their minds and seek to understand their feelings!

The day after Bella's burial Hartl said good-bye to his master and the animals. Mr. Philadelphia was very loth to part with his young assistant. His rough heart had grown fond of the boy during the three years they had been together. In his wandering life over all the world he had often had to change his pupil. The subordinate position he had to offer was not very attractive to circus people. Many adventurous souls who had lost their moral character in human society would accept such a position and hope to regain lost paths. In most cases it was already too late. Restless spirits, adventure-lovers, cannot persevere for long in one post, they can no longer subordinate themselves or get into the habit of regular work. Drink and quarrelsomeness drives them from one engagement to another. Frequently these unstable people are in debt and seek to hide themselves from the authorities.

In Hartl, Mr. Philadelphia had had a good and intelligent collaborator. As most of the animal keepers were crude in their dealings with men and beasts Hartl made quite a reputation for himself. He did not bother himself

much about men, but his whole heart was given to the animals. The old trainer knew that he would never again find such a trustworthy, honourable and persevering assistant. Hartl's best qualification was his instinctive understanding of the animal mind. When the young man passed through the circus stables the horses turned their heads towards him, the dogs jumped up at him, the cats rubbed their heads against his legs and his elephants became restless and trumpeted if he took too long to get to them.

All women were attracted by Hartl. Something went out from him that bewitched them. Men liked him, too, although many thought that he must be proud as he never made a close friendship.

The story of the legacy had reached the ears of the circus people. It soon developed into a legend, everyone added something to the amount and in a few days it had multiplied itself sixfold. Somebody started the story that Hartl was an Austrian prince in disguise or an adventurous archduke who had run away. Soon even the originator of the tale was believing it, and after the young man had had himself re-clothed by a first-class tailor in Adelaide and took his leave in this smart attire, all doubts disappeared. Certainly he must be an archduke! The tale remained as the rooted opinion of the circus and persisted for many years.

After Hartl had said good-bye to his companions he stood for a long time in the animal tent by Soliman's side. He had stroked the other animals and bidden them adieu. Soliman snorted loudly when a coolie took Hartl's ship's trunk on his shoulders and left the tent with it. Hartl laid his cheek against Soliman's rough cracked trunk. It was difficult for him to part from his companion of the last three years, He had shared all his sorrow and all his joy with Soliman. The great ears of the animal would move to and fro, his head would nod as though he understood everything that was being confided to him, and who can say that animals do not understand? Certainly he took it all in and in his own way confided in his master.

Hartl was sad. Here he was leaving a true companion and this grieved him, for certainly any other keeper would treat him unkindly. In this moment Hartl made a resolution never to give away one of his animals lest they should

fall into the wrong hands. Rather would he kill them than suffer this agony of parting and of foreboding that they might be mishandled in the future.

Soliman had become apprehensive; he laid his trunk against Hartl's back as though he wished to hold him tight.

"Good luck, Soliman, God bless you, you're a good fellow and I'll never forget you. We'll meet again. Perhaps some day I'll join Mr. Philadelphia again in the same show. See, Soliman, if you were as little as Puppy I'd buy you from Mr. Philadelphia," Hartl smiled. "Be good, Soliman, I must go." Again he rubbed his cheek against the elephant's trunk, suddenly seized his handkerchief and rushed out.

Soliman snorted, trumpeted loudly and shook at the chains that bound his foot. The other elephants joined in the concert.

The *Empress of India* had delivered her freight at Adelaide and taken a new cargo on board. The sirens hooted dully and called the loiterers on board. Derricks and cranes had finished their work and the donkey machines aboard were silent.

Harriet and Cora had come down to the harbour, they wanted to shake Hartl once more by the hand. Both sisters were still in love with him. Each carried a little bouquet and a packet with a keepsake in it.

The left gangway was hauled up and a last signal from the bell, and the sirens told all who loitered on the quay to hurry on board and the visitors to return to land.

Quickly, without reflecting, Hartl kissed Harriet and Cora and ran up the right gangway. Immediately the ropes were loosed and the great ship sailed slowly out of the harbour.

The Domanski sisters stood on the edge of the quay and waved with their handkerchiefs which often too had to be used to wipe their eyes. Cora shouted in English :

"Don't forget to write, Mr. Gürtler !"

"No, no !" answered Hartl.

Puppy stood by his feet and barked. Hartl took her in his arms. Joyfully she barked towards the quay.

But there was an uproar in the streets of Adelaide. An enormous elephant, a broken chain on his leg, was tearing towards the harbour knocking all down that came in his way. People were fleeing on all sides. The police and firemen were called out.

Soliman had freed himself from his fetters. He knew that he had lost his instructor and friend, he did not want to lose him. Perhaps the clever animal feared that in the place of his friend a new animal-torturer might appear like Josef Sokoup and that he would have to kill him. Then he would be punished and shoved out of the troupe.

People shoved against each other and hurried out of the way or hid when they saw the loudly trumpeting stampeding elephant.

When he reached the quay Soliman saw a big ship gliding out of the harbour. He stretched out his trunk, took a deep breath of air and without hesitating jumped from the high quay wall into the water and swam towards the steamer.

Hartl was in his cabin when the shouting on board lured him up to the deck. He ran upstairs. Everyone was leaning against the railings in a state of great excitement. The cry, "An elephant, an elephant," was heard on all sides.

Hartl pushed through the crowd. Something told him that it was Soliman who had broken his chains and who was now seeking him. With trunk in air Soliman swam after the boat. Nearer and nearer came the enormous animal.

The captain and first officer stood on the bridge. Hartl rushed up the steps.

"Captain, do stop the ship ; the animal may hit the screw and hurt himself !"

The captain looked at the young man.

"Please stop it ; he has swum after me—oh, please stop the ship !"

It was not out of consideration for the animal that the captain stopped the ship, but because if the heavy creature really banged into the screw, more than the animal would be hurt.

The great elephant swam round the ship trumpeting loudly. The gangway was lowered and Hartl climbed down it. When he was near to the surface of the water he shouted loudly to Soliman. The elephant turned round, saw his master and swam towards him. Hartl got on to the neck of the beast who immediately set up a fanfare of joy, and allowed his head to be turned towards land.

"Wait for me," called out Hartl (in English) to the deck. "I will take a fast propeller to reach you right away !"

A vast crowd stood on the pier. Hartl guided Soliman to some stone steps. Above stood Mr. Philadelphia with his keepers. The elephant climbed up the steps with Hartl on his back. The people applauded and shouted out words of encouragement.

With two chains attached to his feet Soliman emitted a terrible howl when Hartl left the tent. He reared himself and in vain tried to free himself.

Hartl hurried back to the harbour, a launch took him to the *Empress of India*. He was in deepest misery. "Poor Soliman, poor Soliman," he whispered over and over again. As the launch neared the steamer, people beckoned to him from the deck and pointed to the water. Hartl's heart almost stopped. Puppy had jumped after him and for half an hour had been swimming round looking for her master until she was quite exhausted. Trembling she lay in Hartl's arms, whining, moaning, and, before he could stop her, licking him all over his face with her hot tongue.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

WHISTLING and singing Rosl Stollhof sprang up the stone staircase three steps at a time. She crashed into Mrs. Prihoda who was carrying a full basket of linen pressed close to her body, and the usually very talkative lady sat down on the flagstones where the bump had placed her against her will, and stared at the girl who was picking up the scattered linen with many apologies. At last she recovered her breath.

"Drat you, you slut, drat you—are you mad? You deserve a box on the ear for running into an old woman like that—wretched hussy that you are!"

"But Frau Pschihodaaaah," sang out Rosl, "I didn't see you; and you haven't really hurt yourself. You've only bumped your sit-upon a little."

"What's that? What's that about sit-upons? Whoever heard of me having such a thing?"

"Well, don't get angry, your sitting on it."

"I'm sitting in a heap of filth, thanks to you, you young——"

Rosl ran on and left the Bohemian sitting and cursing

on the stairs. The Pschick fellow was leaning against the house-door smoking a Virginian cigar with a weed behind his right ear. A whole hour he had waited for Rosl Stollhof. For years he had pursued her with his attentions, ever since he had been a schoolboy. He took it as an insult that Rosl had never listened to him or been familiar with him.

The lads of the Seven Houses and his friends at the market-garden teased him about his untiring, fruitless wooing. It puzzled him that this poor girl should turn down him, the rich gardener's son. He did not want to marry her, although he had sometimes promised that he would, but he had said that he would care for her when she came out of the lying-in hospital The child she could give out to some peasants in the country. He would pay them for its monthly keep.

She always laughed at him, was pleased to see him, would go out with him to dance at Weiland's or Krael's, or the vintage festivals, but she energetically repulsed any approach to closer intimacies. Once on the way home on the Nussdorfer landing-stage he became rough and wanted to show his strength. She then scratched his face and hit him over the head with her sunshade till it broke. The next day she went to his father and complained about Karl. Old Pschick, homely but high-principled, called his grown-up son into the presence of the enraged maiden, and boxed his ears. Then he gathered Rosl a bunch of carnations from his garden.

For months Rosl did not see the Pschick boy. Then on one of the Church feast days he bought her a big horseman made of gingerbread at Nimmrichter's and promised that he would never ask for any more favours from her until she herself wished him to.

Then Rosl had laughed and said :

"You'll have to wait a long time. You'll be as old as the Wandering Jew first !"

"Are you still waiting for that clown, Hartl Gürtler ?" he asked angrily.

"A clown is someone you laugh at. I've never had to laugh at Hartl Gürtler, but very often at you."

"You just wait. You'll have a child by me yet."

"You know perfectly well I shall not. Anyway, I don't want any child reeking of cabbages and turnips and radishes."

"Well, we've got pinks and roses and pelagoniums and masses of other flowers."

"Well, you don't smell of them."

The music began. They were playing "The Clever Boy from Dornbach". Ferdl, the coachman, and Schani Schwarzl, the cabby, got up in front of the musicians, threw their arms round each other, put their caps over their ears and sang :

"The winter time is past and gone,
The snow and ice are melted quite,
The green leaves slowly grow again
Where lately all was white.
The meadow which was long asleep
Begins to wake and smile.
All Nature, from her slumber roused
Will now rejoice awhile.
A thousand voices now proclaim
The coming of the spring ;
The cuckoo tells the world his name,
The nightingale will sing.
Hurrah, the winter time is past,
And spring has come at last !"

Rosl, like the good Viennese she was, sang the chorus in harmony. She was a good singer when her mind wasn't too much troubled by thoughts of Hartl.

Now Karl had been waiting an hour for Rosl. To-day he was determined to win her. To-day she must belong to him. On Sunday morning at Adam's bowling alley they had once more taunted him with Rosl, but he'd played trumps when he betted them that he'd have her that very week. To-day was Friday. For a whole week he had not seen her. It had been raining, and young girls don't enjoy sitting out on wet grass, especially those who like Rosl Stollhof make a great point of keeping themselves and their clothes clean. He had promised to stand fifty pints of beer on Sunday if he didn't bring it off. The Peterl boy, Loisl Fasching and Toni Altmann were determined to watch from a distance and see with their own eyes whether he carried it off. They were watching No. 7 from opposite, and made coarse jokes when they saw Toggenburg Pschick at the entrance.

"So you've come at last," Pschick said to Rosl, blinking at the three opposite. "You've been a pretty good time." He spoke loud on purpose so that the three opposite should hear him.

"Well, it's nothing to do with me if you've been waiting for me," Rosl answered aggressively.

The three opposite nudged each other, and Toni Altmann spat. Rosl glanced across and saw there was something up. She determined to be on her guard, in case Karl should have some mischief up his sleeve.

"Come on, Rosl, let's go for a walk."

"No, thanks. I'd rather not."

Loisl Fasching, from opposite, sang out :

> "The ways of love are very strange,
> They never go by rule ;
> But whether he's merry or whether he's sad,
> A man in love is a fool."

"You've been up to something, eh ?" said Rosl, her eyes blazing at the boy in front of her. "You don't imagine I'm going for a walk with you ? You poor fool, you may as well know I've had a letter from Hartl, not one only either, I've had two. It's a long time since I've had any use for a cabbage-grower like you."

Karl Pschick saw red. His three chums had come up, whispering to each other, and now they stood at the edge of the pavement.

"You just shut your mouth and come along with me to Three Bridges : you know, where we've been before."

Flaming spots came into Rosl's cheeks at this insinuation. She'd never been there with the gardener's son. The place in question was a well-known rendezvous for working-class lovers.

"You scamp, who do you think you're talking to ?" shouted Rosl. "I've never been anywhere with you, and especially never to Three Bridges. What are you thinking of ? I wouldn't go with you if you were made of money instead of manure. You brute, d'you think you can insult me ?"

She boxed him hard on both ears and shot like lightning into the house. Karl Pschick tried to follow her, but went bumping into Kaczmareck who thrust him back furiously.

"That's not true love !" sang out Loisl Fasching, while the others roared with laughter.

Upstairs Rosl met Mitzi, who in recent years had developed into a fine girl, considerably taller than Rosl. Mitzi was well-known as the prettiest girl in the district. Men followed her everywhere and pestered her with

professions of love. Frau Höllriegel would long since have given Mitzi a home, but Mitzi begged to be allowed to remain with Frau Gürtler. If Loisi assented it was not for Mitzi's sake, but out of regard for Frau Gürtler who was devoted to Mitzi.

So Mitzi remained in the Seven Houses. She had received a first-class education and now had private tuition in several subjects, as well as piano and singing lessons from the best teachers. She was now taking painting lessons at the Angeli's school.

She persisted in treating all suitors with scorn. Young men of wealthy family, who frequented the Höllriegels, asked for her hand, and got nothing but blunt refusals. Loisi reproached her for this, asking who she was waiting for.

"I'm waiting for Hartl, Hartl Gürtler."

"That's childish," Loisi answered, and once in a temper, she added: "Hartl won't have anything to do with you. If he takes anybody from the Seven Houses it will be Rosl Stollhof. He used to go with her when he was a ragamuffin boy. Why, he never gives you a thought."

"Oh, yes, he does, dear Aunt Loisi. In every letter he sends a special message for me. I tell you Hartl lives in me and I in him, and sure as there's a God in Heaven, some day I'll be joined to him."

But now for the first time Hartl had enclosed a note specially for Rosl, while for Mitzi there had only been a message in the letter to Frau Gürtler, a nice message, but that wasn't the same as a special letter. Mitzi's heart had sunk when she heard that Rosl had a letter from Hartl. She felt rather better when she saw the letter and found nothing about love in it, nothing at all, in fact, but a few trivial phrases.

But Mitzi would not surrender her dream. Like Rosl she had her own interior life. The sadness which had oppressed a family for years, and the martyrdom of Frau Gürtler, made the deepest impression on the over-sensitive girl. Frau Gürtler never made any distinction between Mitzi and her own children. Yet in Mitzi's heart and thoughts there was always an empty spot. When she learned that she was a love child, and that her mother had died young, she began to meditate over her own young life and became more and more reserved. And after she had

discovered that her love belonged to Hartl, and had been unable, through all these years, to give up the thought of him, or to tear it out of her heart, she dreamed of nothing but Hartl, certain that she could never be happy except at his side. Finally, she was firmly persuaded that Hartl had been assigned by God to her, for a love which had begun in childhood, and grown ever stronger instead of fading, could only be inspired by God. She no longer worried herself about Rosl's everlasting love dreams of Hartl. She said to herself that Rosl's love was just a bonfire which wouldn't last. Hartl would soon be able to see whose love was more deep and genuine. She credited him with a supernatural vision, enabling him to read human hearts.

"Listen, Mitzi, I've just given Karl Pschick something which will last him for a long time, the silly fool. He thinks I'm going out to the Three Bridges with him."

"Well, why do you go on talking to him ?"

"What can I do if he always waits for me at the front door, as he did to-night ? I've told him often enough I don't want to have anything to do with him. I only care for one man and I'll marry him. That's Hartl Gürtler."

"D'you think he'll marry you, Rosl ? He says nothing in his letter to you. He hasn't even sent you a kiss."

"All the same, I'm perfectly sure he's going to marry me. Last week I went to the fortune-teller's and she read it out of my cards. And if he doesn't marry me, I'll be his just the same."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Rosl ?" cried Mitzi. "Do you think Hartl would ever do a thing like that ? He's much too straight a boy for that."

Wawerl Wurz, a silly girl of fourteen, now came up from the third floor and joined the other two. She touched Rosl on the arm.

"Is it true, Rosl ?" she asked. "Have you had a letter from Asia from Hartl Gürtler ? You know Annerl Reisl says she won't ever let men write to her, because you can easily get a child that way."

Rosl went into fits of laughter. "Naturally," she said, "every letter brings another child. I've got one already. I'll show it you to-morrow morning."

The Wawerl girl ran down shouting : "Hi ! Rosl Stollhof's had a baby from Hartl Gürtler."

Frau Gürtler was quite delighted when Hartl, writing from Aden, promised to send his address as soon as he landed in Lisbon. At last she could pour out her heart to the boy, and let him know that his father had long been dead. It would upset Hartl a good deal, but he would have to know. There was no reason for him to know anything of her illness, her crazy legs, the ugly varicose veins that had plagued her for years, and the heart pains which had got so much worse. He couldn't possibly help her, so why should he know? He'd had his own sufferings—that could be read between the lines of his own short letters, in which there had never been a light-hearted word. What had become of the merry child he had once been? Recently she had been much tormented by the thought that death might remove her before she had a chance of opening her heart to the boy, giving him good counsel for the rest of his life and seeing him laugh heartily again. She wondered how big he had grown, for in all these years he'd never sent a photograph of himself.

A week later a letter came from Lisbon in which Hartl announced his arrival and gave his address, asking his mother to write to him at the Hotel Suisse-Portugies, Avenida 26, where he would be staying another fortnight until his legacy business was settled. In any case he urgently asked his mother to send him his certificate of residence which he would need in connection with the legacy.

Since she knew Hartl was in Europe, Frau Gürtler seemed to have grown many years younger. She no longer noticed her legs or her heart. She sang with her daughters while they were ironing, and all day long the conversation turned on Hartl.

Rosl had obtained Hartl's address from his mother, and she wrote him a long letter. She began ten or twenty times, and each time tore up the sheet. Deep in thought she chewed her pen-holder. This time she could make no use of the "Guide to Love Letter Writing". In desperation she tugged at her hair, until at last she thought she had the right form.

DEAR HARTL,

At last I can write to you, after three long years. As a matter of fact, I've written you a letter every week, and put it away in the cupboard, which is now quite

full. But I won't send you those letters. You can read them when we're married.

If I weren't so fond of you, I should have to scold you. All these years I've waited, asking the postman every time if he had anything for me, and he never had.

Dear Hartl, I'm still waiting for you. I've saved up. I haven't spent anything, and if your dear mother hadn't always given me things, I'd probably have starved by now. Anyway, I've saved up 329 guilders, which is enough to furnish a bedroom and a kitchen very nicely. Plates and bedding I shall get from my mother, and when we marry we shall get some presents from our relations and from the guests. Couldn't you ask Herr Höllriegel to be witness? An uncle of mine could be the other witness, the one who's in the Railways. Dear Hartl, I'm as fond as ever of you, or rather much fonder, and I'm so delighted to think you're coming back. When will you reach Vienna? Write so that I can meet the train.

So long, my dear Hartl. Write to me at once. I'm longing for you. Ever so many hugs and kisses,

Your ROSL.

Oh, yes, there's something I must add. Karl Pschick's still running after me. Not long ago he wanted to take me to the Three Bridges, but I gave him what for. Please answer immediately.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

HIS head in his hands, Hartl sat by the hotel table. The tears ran down his cheeks and his body was shaken with sobs. Before him lay his mother's letter telling him about his father's death. His father had been dead for years and he had not known it, never even dreamed of it. How hard death must have been to his father, how his thoughts in the hour of death must have gone out to his absent sons Ignaz and Hartl! How much his mother must have suffered! Why did he always do things that occasioned suffering to others? Could he not bring anyone

a little sunshine, a little joy ? What was it that urged him always along the wrong road ? He was not really bad ; he loved his father, mother, sisters and brother. Was he really two persons in one ? Did he possess a second soul ?

What great sins lay on his head, what heavy burdens on his soul ? All light had gone from him, all pleasure and joy in the legacy had disappeared. His plans to become great had crumbled in a night. Certainly he would only bring more suffering to others.

Hartl looked back over the lives of his parents. He knew that his mother and father had been happy only in the Waldviertel where they had had a peaceful and joyful time until the outbreak of the smallpox epidemic, when joy had gone from their lives. These two had never done any harm in their lives ; always helping their fellowmen and leading godly lives. Why did they have to suffer so much ? Whose fault was it ? Had one of their forefathers sinned so heavily ? Until the third and fourth generation shall the sins of the parents be avenged. Was that right ? Why should the guiltless be punished ? He, Hartl, had sinned. He had run away from his parents and brought them endless suffering, but he had been young in those days, a mere child, and did not know what he was doing ; but later, when he had reached the age of understanding, he had been silent for years leaving his parents in uncertainty, torturing them. What secret, unknown power drove him to do such things that were so far from his true character ? He only meant to do good, and had always thought of his parents with affection and had made plans for taking all care off their shoulders.

His heart ached, his conscience pangs increased, he thought how sinful it had been to wander through the world all those years without giving his parents the chance of writing to him. Now his father had been dead for three years and he had never known of it ! Would his sins be forgiven him?

A knock on the door brought him violently out of his meditations.

A boy told Hartl that a gentleman was waiting for him below.

In the hall stood a young man, who said that he had come from the Italian Consulate. Hartl followed him through the lively streets of the town. In front of the cafés sat the Portuguese professional loungers conversing loudly with one

another. Their words were supplemented by much gesticulation and their faces too worked in ever-changing grimaces. Barefooted flower-girls offered fragrant blossoms. Their business was conducted in an original manner. When a foreigner or a well-dressed Portuguese came along he found his way blocked by a more or less young and beautiful flower-seller who seized his coat, stuck a flower in his button-hole and then held out her hand. Sometimes one would pursue him for an hour.

On the harbour a placard caught Hartl's eye. On it was written "Colisée Recraios". He determined to visit the show that evening.

The identification formalities by the Italian Consul were soon completed. The Consul, a genuine count, congratulated Hartl as he placed his signature on the cheque.

"Now I am rich," said Hartl to himself as he walked through the streets of Lisbon, the cheque in his pocket. "I am rich and approaching the goal I have worked for so long, but I am not yet happy. During the odd life I have lived for so many years I have made existence a dark hell for myself, full of torments. No wonder I am in such a gloomy state of mind. I certainly deserve to be." He sighed deeply and shivered. No, he would not let himself be overwhelmed. He pulled himself together. It was ridiculous for a young man not yet twenty-one to allow himself to be so shaken by sorrow. No, he must live for the sake of his mother, he must smooth the evening of her life and all else must give way to this.

That evening Hartl visited Lisbon's one and only variety show, the Colisée Recraios. Some of the turns had been well known in the "Flying Devils" in Hartl's time. A turn with lions made him feel quite sick. A hefty lad entered the lions' cage and chivied them pointlessly round in circles by means of cracking of whips, revolver shots and iron forks. It was only after much brutal thrashing that he succeeded in arranging a scene where the beasts stood on pedestals. The music made a terrible din and it seemed that it was trying to drown the noise on the stage. The drumsticks hammered everlastingly on the skin drums and kettledrums, and dinned into the ears of the public.

Hartl boiled with anger. He would have liked to have rushed on to the cage and beaten the trainer with his rhinoceros-hide whip.

"What a swine!" The words escaped from Hartl unintentionally as the tormenter awkwardly acknowledged the applause. He looked at his programme to see what the animal-torturer was called and a name caught his eye.

"Los Esmeraldos".

The picture of a beautiful woman came into his mind. Two large dark eyes in a small refined face, a sensuous mouth always a little open and showing two rows of spotless teeth.

"Juanita!" In a low voice he breathed the name. A wave of emotion seized him. This woman had woken him from his childish dreams; she had made his life miserable. Up to the time that the Mexican woman had kissed him and laid her spell on him, he had been a happy youth, building castles in the air in a world of fantasy. Since Juanita had left him, he had been continually melancholy and could not shake it off.

A terrific flourish of trumpets brought him back to the present. The curtain rose and there stood Juanita motionless on the stage. Her full figure in its pink tights showed clearly against the black background. She was alone on the stage. The orchestra began to play a fandango. Slowly Juanita began to dance. She moved forward stamping on the ground, beating time with her castanets, suddenly made some pirouettes and threw herself with outstretched arms against the black wall. In that moment a shining dagger came whistling over the spectators' heads and buried itself in the wood right above the dancer's head.

Juanita continued her dance and each time that she threw herself against the black wall a dagger flew from a different part of the auditorium and stuck itself in the wood.

Hartl recovered his breath. As he turned round after the first throw he saw the Mexican standing not far from his seat with a raised dagger in his hand. For the fourth throw Esmeraldo was next to Hartl. The young man's life hung by a thread.

The Mexican had not forgotten his wife's affair in South Africa. If he had guessed who was sitting in front of him, his dagger would not have flown to the stage but would have pierced the young man's throat. Ever since he had left Richard's Circus the Mexican had awaited an opportunity to avenge himself on Hartl, the destroyer of his

marital happiness. On that same day he meant to kill his wife.

Esmeraldo harboured grisly plans: he wanted to catch Hartl, to bring him by force to his dwelling, to tie up Juanita and to torture the young man to death in her presence. He should die by inches and the traitress, unable to move, should look on.

Now the avenger stood next the victim he had chosen for his horrid scheme; and he did not know it.

Hartl guessed what was in store for him if his enemy recognized him; he was not afraid but he meant to avoid death. The avenging dagger was quick and certain.

The searchlight was switched from the stage on to the auditorium and settled on Esmeraldo, Hartl's head, too, came within its orbit.

As one bewitched Juanita gazed at her former lover. Only for a minute was she in anxiety and fear. Above Hartl's head appeared the arm with the shining dagger, quickly the woman hurled herself into her place and immediately the dagger pierced the wall close by her heart.

As Hartl was returning to his hotel after the performance by the Avenida, he suddenly heard someone softly calling his name.

"*Amore!*" Two delicate female arms slipped round his neck.

Unwillingly Hartl loosed Juanita's arms from his neck.

"Juanita, please don't do that in the public streets. Why have you come after me? Why didn't you stay with your husband?"

"*Amore*, he is only my partner, not my husband. Come, dearest, come; for years I have been so unhappy and all for your sake."

"Things are different now, Juanita. Since you left me I have learnt that what I felt for you was not real love."

"I know, I know, but I love you and I want to make you love me. You belong to me! I was your first love and I want to be your only love."

Again Hartl moved her hands from his shoulders.

"Juanita, nobody can force me. Be sensible, I was so very young."

She stood in front of him breathing deeply. Her great

dark eyes shone out from her powdered face. He stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, Juanita, let me go quietly ; I want to have some peace. I am in such torment."

"Give me this evening, only a few hours, *Amore*. I will ask no more."

She pushed him into a cab.

"Come, we'll go to the mountain of Our Blessed Lady. Let me just sit next to you. I don't want anything else."

Through the still narrow streets the vehicle wound its way to the fortressed hill. The sky was a veritable ocean of stars, the air was mild and soft.

The hill of Our Blessed Lady towers a thousand feet high above Lisbon. In spite of the late hour it was alive with life and movement. Children chased each other round the old trees and everywhere loving couples lay in deep embraces. Nobody seemed to object. Young girls brushed by and cast amorous glances at Hartl.

Far below shone the lights of Lisbon. Out on the Tagus could be seen the ship's lights of a South American steamer.

Hartl stood in a reverie and gazed at the lovely picture below. He had never seen anything more beautiful.

Juanita stood by him ; she had realized on the drive to the mountain that it would be useless to try to seduce the young man. Her heart was heavy and tears stood in her eyes. As she looked at Hartl she realized for the first time how young he was and how ludicrous it was for her to seek to fetter him. She took his hand tenderly and pressed it against her cheek.

"*Amore*, I see how silly I've been. You are right. Come, let's go back to the town."

Hartl looked once more at the town beneath, then followed Juanita to the cab. He would never forget that view of Lisbon by night from the hill of Our Blessed Lady.

They returned in silence. The woman held Hartl's hand and from time to time placed it to her lips. He wished to stop her doing this.

"Let me be, *Amore*. It's so precious to have these few moments by your side."

As the cab passed through the piazza Juanita suddenly gave a shout and threw herself in front of him. She screamed again and now a warm stream of blood oozed over Hartl.

People rushed up, a crowd formed at the street corner,

police hurried to the scene and dragged a man up to the cab.

Juanita lay against Hartl, whose face had gone deathly pale. A long dagger stuck in her throat.

Juanita was dead. The instrument of death had pierced an artery. Her eyes were wide open, staring up to the starry sky. Her mouth was a little open, as though she were still giving her cry of warning. Hartl's face and hands were covered with blood, he could not speak and was trembling all over.

The police shoved Esmeraldo into the carriage. He tried to tear himself loose and to throw himself on Hartl. Strong arms held him fast. A flood of filthy swear-words came from his lips.

A young man leapt into the carriage and bent over Juanita.

"She is dead," he said, after he had examined her. He gently pulled the knife out of the wound.

The big steamer on the Tagus puffed slowly down-stream out of the port. On the sun-deck lay Hartl stretched in a deck-chair, looking at the panorama of the coast of Portugal as he passed by. The steward passed with a tray of sandwiches. Hartl shook his head and refused.

He had lain here for hours. His usually steady nerves were still shaken after yesterday's adventure.

Juanita had saved him with her own life. He could not calm himself. He kept reproaching himself. He could not still his conscience. He should have firmly shaken Juanita off; he should not have taken the drive with her. Now the lovely creature was lying in an anatomical institute in Lisbon and Esmeraldo was waiting to be hanged.

Two human lives were cut short.

Once more Hartl swore that in order to avoid fresh trouble he would keep away from all women. Near him on the ground lay the "Critique of Pure Reason" of the immortal philosopher. Hartl had tried to understand all that was in the book, but much remained still a mystery to him and he cursed his lack of education. He was going to England. He wanted to buy some wild animals at the big animal exchange kept by "King Cross" in Liverpool, to take them to London and to prepare his great animal-show in a suburb During the day he would practise with his animals, a

night he would remedy the gaps in his education at a private school. He did not wish to be less educated than other people ; he refused to be ignorant.

In Oporto Hartl sent a telegram to his mother. He gave her his Liverpool address and begged her to write him a long and detailed letter.

The smooth sea, the gentle motion of the boat, soothed his nerves. Most of the time he lay on deck by himself. He avoided the glances of the young women on board, refused all invitations to join in at shuffle and other deck games.

As the ship passed through a heavy sea in the Bay of Biscay, Hartl remembered that the hotel porter on the day of his departure had handed him a letter from Vienna. He only remembered it now and hurried to fetch it. On the back of the envelope he saw Rosl Stollhof's name and address. As he read its contents he could not refrain from smiling. It was the first time he had smiled for a long while. But afterwards he had to think very seriously. Was Rosl going to be a new hindrance in his way ? In any case she evidently believed that he still intended to marry her. He must break it to her, not roughly but quite clearly, that she must get this silly idea out of her head. She would have to be reasonable, and not starve herself, but try to remain a strong healthy girl. The right man would certainly appear in time and great would be his joy to see her married to some fine fellow.

Hartl followed up his thoughts with action. Holding on to the railings he went down to the smoking-room. The ship was rolling heavily and much water was coming aboard.

The smoking-room was occupied only by a seaworthy silent Englishman. The rest were all in their cabins offering up their sacrifices to the Storm God.

The steward brought ink, pens and paper to the writing-room. Hartl's hand glided over the paper and soon a sheet was covered with long lines in blue ink. He sent picture post cards of the ship to his sisters, to Mitzi and to Mr. and Mrs. Höllriegel.

Outside on the promenade-deck behind a door hung a little letter-box. Hartl slipped his letter to Rosl and the post cards into it.

With the approach of night the storm developed into a

hurricane. The waves broke over the vessel. The sea grew stronger and the ship rolled and tossed over the water. The wind howled and roared uncannily.

The quartermaster, his hand on the wheel, the captain and the first mate stood on the bridge, peering into the dark night. The rain poured down. Every minute the sirens sounded dully. They cried their warning into the darkness. Suddenly from the watch came a cry of warning through the megaphone.

"Ship ahead, starboard !"

Immediately the masts of a ship appeared through the mountainous waves.

With a terrific effort the quartermaster turned the wheel. The rudder responded, the ship swung to port.

The signal bells were going hard in the engine-room ; the engines stopped, the ship turned ; then the engines began again and the ship backed.

The sudden swing threw the letter-box to one side, a high wave tore a piece of railing from the promenade deck, the heavy piece of iron crashed into the cabin wall, tore the letter-box away and it was soon washed overboard.

Hartl's letter to Rosl Stollhof, along with all the other letters, sank to the bottom of the Bay of Biscay.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

HARTL acquired twenty-four wild animals from "King Cross" in Liverpool—jaguars, panthers, pumas and leopards, from Africa, Asia, and South America. Four large Danish dogs made up the complement.

Puppy felt greatly humiliated at being thrust into a small basket during the rehearsals, but she could watch her master in the cage through an aperture.

The Liverpool dealer had given Hartl long credit. Mr. Cross admired the young man's courage, and, anyway, the risk was small. If the turn did not succeed he would simply take the animals back, for they remained the property of the firm so long as the debt was not fully paid.

Hartl now rented an old storehouse in Islington, the ugliest district in London. There he put up a great cage, according to his own designs, and started rehearsing. He trained the animals to recognize him, couple by couple.

Avoiding all whips and thongs, and refraining from loud shouts, he carried a loaded revolver by him but determined to use it only in the last resort. Two of the great dogs were always by him. The two keepers, whom he had engaged to look after the animals, had to stay outside the cage.

As soon as two of the animals had grown accustomed to Hartl and to the dogs a new couple were allowed into the cage. Everything to begin with was attempted by way of kindness. Only if an animal became aggressive Hartl took the rhinoceros-hide stick and drove it back.

He had now been eight weeks in London. From early in the morning till late in the evening every day he stayed with his animals in the great cage, and rehearsed. One day the animals got hold of one of the dogs and tore it to pieces, seriously injuring the other also. Hartl himself had been in great danger, but he had succeeded in calming the animals. After that he arranged to have a hose ready, and played a spray of cold water on any animal which attacked him or one of the dogs. Outside the cage stood Victor Vaughan, one of the keepers, and held the hose in constant readiness.

Hartl intended to rehearse two months more, and by that time he thought he would be ready to bring his turn on the stage. It was novel, and altogether different from all other circus numbers with felines. The animals responded to a gentle call, and even the rhinoceros-hide stick seldom had to be used.

The final tableau was magnificent. Hartl stood in the middle of the great cage; to his right and his left were twelve stands. Six of these were occupied by great panthers which at a word of command leapt over Hartl's head and landed upon empty stands. Meanwhile the dogs stood with their front paws on Hartl's shoulder, and kept watch. The other animals, divided in two companies of six, ran round the posts in a circle. After ten jumps by the panthers all the animals grouped themselves round the trainer.

It was this finale which gave Hartl most work. He had great difficulty in accustoming the animals to keep their places and jump all at once. If they did so, they were given special meat rations to reward them. And the first time the trick was perfectly performed Hartl gave a sovereign to each keeper.

He was in the highest spirits when he went to Lisle Street to invite an agent to come and see the number the next day. But when he reached his hotel, the Jermyn Court Hotel, Jermyn Street, a great surprise was in store for him. The porter said: "There's a young lady upstairs in the breakfast-room waiting for you. She's been there since the morning."

Hartl looked in astonishment at the porter. Who could this young lady be? He knew nobody in London.

"What is her name?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the porter. "She couldn't speak a word of English."

Hartl went up in the lift, full of thoughts. As he came into the room where one or two people were sitting over cups of tea, a slim young girl ran towards him, threw both arms round his neck, and shouted: "Hartl, Hartl, my boy, now I've got you and I'll never let go of you."

Hartl had to struggle free of her embraces. At first he had not known who she was, but when she opened her mouth, he knew at once that it was Rosl Stollhof who was kissing him in public like this.

The guests in the hotel had looked round, the men smirking and the women sniffing. "Shocking," said a dessicated Welsh spinster. "What kind of a place are we in?"

"She may be his sister," a man said.

The dessicated lady turned on him: "I know how a sister kisses her brother."

"Look here, Rosl," he said at last. "We can't stand here kissing in front of all these people." He was ashamed of the scene, as the blush in his cheeks showed.

"Why, Hartl, why should you be so shy? I'm your own girl. What do the people matter?"

He took her into the passage, and without thinking what he was doing led her into his room. The housemaid saw them and stared at them, and then telephoned the news downstairs.

The moment he shut the door Rosl was hanging round his neck. Tears were pouring down her cheeks. "My own boy, my Hartl, I've got you again, my dear good sweet Hartl."

She pressed her hot lips on his and her body against him. Breathing heavily he moved her arms from his shoulders and forced her into a chair. Then he sat down and was

about to speak. She stared at him in horrified amazement, and as though she feared he was going to say something awful, flung herself in his arms crying: "Don't talk; don't say anything. I've waited years for you, but I couldn't stick it in Vienna any longer. I'd have died if I hadn't followed you. Hartl, d'you want me to die? D'you want me to jump into the Danube?"

He could not help laughing. "You'd have plenty of time to think it over before you got to the Danube," he said. "The Danube's a long way off."

"Doesn't it run through England? Well, I'll go back to the ship I came in from Hamburg, and throw myself in the sea. Anyway," she said, drying her tears, "what are you going to say now?"

She was glad he had laughed. She thought it meant she had won the day. When she was sitting in the train, just as it steamed out of the North West Station, the idea had come to her for the first time that Hartl might send her back, and throughout the journey it had tormented her. She had come third-class to Hamburg, arriving dead tired at the Klostertor station.

When Hartl's telegram reached Vienna, giving his address in Liverpool and London, Rosl went mad with joy, and kissed her mother, Frau Gürtler, Emilie, Rosa and even Mitzi. She had two reasons for rejoicing. For two years she had been buying tickets in the lottery, and an hour before she had learned that she had drawn a number and won 350 guilders. She was rich, incredibly rich. Hartl could not make a better match, nor find another woman to love him better. She wanted now to send her mother to the country, to Leobendorf, near Korneuburg. Laawirt, a distant cousin, was ready to give her a room through the summer and and she would pay only 50 kreuzers a day for food.

As for Rosl, she meant to say nothing to anyone about her trip to join and wed Hartl. When they were properly married the young husband should send telegrams to Vienna and Leobendorf like this:

> Richardl Gürtler and Rosl Gürtler *née* Stollhof beg to announce their marriage.

That would give them something to talk about! Then she'd send Karl Pschick a photograph of herself, as bride, with Hartl.

Owing to her mother's tragic death, Rosl had to put off her journey. Michael Meyer, who every week drove his cart from Leobendorf to the market in Vienna, had offered to take Frau Stollhof on his return journey, and the invalid had been delighted at the idea. When Michael Meyer stopped in front of the Seven Houses, Rosl brought down a pile of bedding, prepared a comfortable place under the awning for her mother, gave her a bottle of warm coffee, and asked the peasant to look after his mother.

Frau Stollhof reeled off a number of instructions to Rosl and then Michael Meyer drove off among greetings from the neighbours, down the Wenzelgasse to the Jägerstrasse. The peasant chatted with the invalid lying by his side, and did not hear the bell signal of the steam-tram coming along the Jägerstrasse. The engine crashed at full speed into the cart and overturned it. Michael Meyer escaped with a fright, but Frau Stollhof was extracted dead from beneath the cart.

The priest at the graveside declared it was God's will, and Rosl repeated that it was God's will. Only a few weeks before Doctor Rosenthal had said to Frau Gürtler that with her cancer Frau Stollhof could not live much longer. Rosl had heard this. Now her mother had been put out of pain, and Rosl said to herself without remorse that it was best for both of them.

While Rosl sat alone at home, Frau Gürtler came in to her. She was sorry for this child whom she had known from birth, wondering what life would have in store for so emotional a girl.

"Rosl," she said, "if you don't like being at home come along and sleep a few nights with us."

"Thanks very much, Frau Gürtler. I'm not afraid. Mother's dead, and the dead can't do us any harm."

The fact was that spending the night with the Gürtlers would not have fitted in with Rosl's plans. She meant to disappear without anyone knowing anything about it.

Rosl still had over eighty guilders left from the sums paid by the benevolent societies to which her mother had belonged. She had more and more of an idea of her wealth. She also took her mother's ear-rings and jewellery and converted them into money. Then she bought, second-hand, a small trunk and a handbag and took them both to the home of a friend in Leopoldstadt. Every evening she brought

along part of the things that she wanted to take with her. In the Taborstrasse she bought a ready-made dress, some shoes, and a coat. She inquired exactly how she should get to London, and conscientiously noted down every detail. These preparations took two weeks.

When it came to taking her third-class ticket to Hamburg at the North West Station, her fingers were trembling. In all her young life she had never been further than Kritzendorf. Now she was to undertake a long journey.

During the night she draped the kitchen window with her mother's shawl, so that nobody should see the lamp burning from the street. Then she cooked half a pound of veal, which she hoped would last her till she got to London. All the eatables in the house she put out on the kitchen table. Then she wrote a long letter to Hartl's mother, begging her pardon for the lies she had told her, and informing her that she had gone to join Hartl. She meant to post the letter before she left.

The next afternoon she went in to see Frau Gürtler. She wanted an excuse for handing her the keys to look after. So she said: "Frau Gürtler, I'm going to my aunt at Dornbach and I shall stay a day or two with her. Would you be so kind as to keep the keys while I'm away? Otherwise I'm afraid I'll lose them."

"Yes, bring them here."

"Thanks very much Frau Gürtler. I may be away a bit longer. If so, will you just peep in and see if everything's all right at home?"

Frau Gürtler looked at Rosl; she scented that there was something peculiar in the air but she felt that she had no right to force the girl's confidence. The last thing the old woman would have thought of was a journey to England. She would never have suspected that the girl was capable of such an adventure. A journey to England! Only experienced men of the world did that kind of thing, people like her Hartl, but she would never have believed it of such a simple lass brought up in the Seven Houses.

Rosl also said good-bye to Emilie, Rosa and Mitzi. Her heart was heavy as she did so, and she ran out of the room with tears in her eyes.

"Mad creature!" commented Milli. "I wonder what she's up to now."

Mitzi was thinking hard. She was roused to suspicion

by Rosl's gestures, and slipped into the passage in order to spy into Rosl's kitchen-window, but the heavy shawl made it impossible for her to see anything. Mitzi hid herself in the recess by the passage window and waited. Shortly after, Rosl appeared in her doorway with several big parcels in her arms. She locked the door and came to bring the keys to the Gürtlers' house, leaving the parcels lying on the passage window-sill.

Mitzi slunk up and fingered the packages. One of them smelt of meat, and greasy spots on it showed that it contained eatables. The other parcel seemed to consist of linen or clothes. If Rosl were only going for a few days to her aunt at Dornbach why was she taking so many things with her? She could always come back and fetch what she wanted. Mitzi looked sharply at Rosl as she came out of the kitchen into the passage.

"Well, Frau Gürtler, I just want to tell you—" Rosl, embarrassed by Mitzi's questioning eyes turned back to the old woman—"there's some dripping and cakes and a little flour on the kitchen table; if I'm not back by Sunday will you be so good as to go and take them so that they won't go bad?"

Mitzi followed Rosl downstairs. At the street door she seized her by the shoulders and turned her round with a jerk.

"You're lying—you've lied to us. You're not going to your aunt at Dornbach—you're going to Hartl!"

Rosl went very white. She pulled herself from Mitzi's grasp and shouted:

"You're mad, you silly idiot!"

She tore herself loose and ran up the street.

Mitzi stared after her without moving. She was wondering how she could prevent Rosl from going. She was certain that she was going to London! Oh, how shameless it was to run after a man like that! She rushed up the stairs and burst into the room.

"Why did you let her go? Why don't you stop her?"

"Whatever's wrong with you, Mitzi? Whom should we stop going? Do you mean Rosl?"

"Yes—don't you know where she's going?"

"Yes, yes," replied Emilie. "She told us. She's going to an aunt at Dornbach."

"You may believe her, but I don't. She's going to Hartl in London."

They all stared at Mitzi.

"Did she tell you so?" asked Frau Gürtler in horrified accents.

"She's not as silly as that—but I know it, I know it for certain."

"Don't make a fool of yourself," shouted Rosa, and her mother nodded a rather doubtful agreement.

"Where does this aunt live at Dornbach?" Mitzi asked pointedly. "Up to now we've only heard of one aunt, the old Toni in Neulerchenfeld, never a word about one in Dornbach."

"Well, if Rosl doesn't come back by Sunday we shall see," put in Frau Gürtler.

Full of anxiety Rosl sat in a third-class carriage in the express train that was due to leave Vienna at ten o'clock. She had brought her things from her friend's room in Leopoldstadt to the station at eight o'clock. The registering of the trunk to Hamburg had been a great complication. She had been horrified at having to pay 3 guilders 50 kreuzer for it. She had thought that having bought her ticket there would be no more expenditure.

The two girls had awaited the arrival of the train behind a screen in the station waiting-room. Rosl was afraid that Mitzi might come with Frau Gürtler and the police and forcibly prevent her making the journey.

When a porter rang the bell to announce that the train was in, the two girls hurried to the barrier. Rosl quickly found a third-class carriage and her friend handed her her packages through the window.

Only when the train actually started could Rosl breathe freely. She regretted that she was travelling by night and so missed seeing the lovely scenery. As the train crossed the "Die Drei Brücken" on the Leipziger Strasse she could see the Seven Houses.

Only a few of the windows had lights in them. The hard-working inhabitants went early to bed. Rosl could see that there was a light in one of the Gürtlers' windows. It was there that the three girls slept. Certainly they would still be awake and talking about her. Rosl was sure that Mitzi would not be able to sleep that night. She would be cursing Rosl and wishing her ill luck. She remembered that she had forgotten to post the letter for Frau Gürtler.

Rosl was tired. The excitement and worry, the

monotonous rattling on the rails made her sleepy. She had horrible dreams. Her head fell on to the shoulder of her neighbour, an old man who pitied the young pale-faced girl, and sat still so as not to disturb her.

When morning broke and the train rushed through Moravia and was nearing the Bohemian frontier Rosl woke up and gazed round astonished. Houses, mountains, trees, telegraph poles, bridges and rivers flew by. She soon remembered where she was and looked round at her snoring and deeply breathing fellow-passengers. Her neighbour was smiling at her.

"Are you awake, little Miss ?"

Rosl smiled and nodded her head. She realized that she was hungry. Where had she put that veal ? There was the packet quite crushed under the cases on the rack. She did not dare stand up. A gentleman from Slovakia had stretched his legs between hers and right under the seat. He was fast asleep and was grunting and snoring.

"Do you know what time it is ?" Rosl whispered to her neighbour.

He extracted a massive silver watch attached to a chain large enough to secure a small ship, and at his touch the lid sprang open.

"It's half-past four."

"Thank you," Rosl sighed. "Shall we soon be in Germany ?"

"We should, but we've already wasted two hours in Trebitsch while something was being done to the engine."

Rosl sighed again, not because the train was late but because she felt so hungry. She had eaten practically nothing the day before from sheer excitement, besides which she now felt very cold. Her neighbour reached down his overcoat and put it across Rosl's knee.

"No, no," she protested. "You'll be cold yourself."

"I've got plenty on."

"Could you reach me down that parcel on the rack, please ?"

"Certainly, little princess."

Rosl unpacked her parcel, and saw that she had forgotten to put in any bread.

"When does the train stop again ?" she asked.

"I don't know. Why do you ask ?"

"Because I haven't got any bread or rolls."

"I can help you with that."

"Then you must have some of my meat."

"Willingly. I'll get you a coffee when the train stops."

"That will be very nice."

"Can't you be quiet when other people want to sleep?"

The words were spoken in a common Viennese accent by a dark-eyed young woman whose very tasteless clothes at once proclaimed her profession. She was sitting next the door.

"Why didn't you take a sleeper?" retorted Rosl's neighbour. "One can surely talk when it's broad daylight?"

Hour after hour passed by. Rosl's companions stared at her as though she were a wild animal when they heard that she was travelling to London in order to get married, and that her fiancé was an aerial acrobat.

The lady by the door spat openly and noisily whenever Rosl mentioned her intended husband.

At last, two-and-a-half hours late, the train steamed into the Anhalt Station in Berlin.

Rosl's neighbour, a mechanic, who travelled round to execute repairs, carried her hand packages and escorted her to the Lehrter station.

The little Viennese girl was astonished by all she saw. Everything seemed so new and strange and she thought it all very beautiful. The coffee in the station restaurant was the only exception. She shuddered.

"What a foul taste! It's pure chicory!"

The Brandenburger Tor made a tremendous impression on Rosl, but the military band coming down the Königgrätzerstrasse disappointed her. Only the drum-major's stick she found interesting.

"How badly they play," she thought, "and they haven't even got a dog or a little pony to carry the big drum, so the drummer has to carry it himself."

When the soldiers met a superior officer, and fell into the goose step, Rosl clapped her hands and burst into laughter. "That's as comic as the clowns' turn at Schnürl's circus!"

"Silly young fool," remarked a corpulent dame and looked Rosl severely up and down, then she lifted the hem of her coat and brushed the street dust off it.

In the express to Hamburg Rosl felt quite nervous. The other passengers were speaking in Berlin, Mecklenburg

and Hamburg dialects and she could not understand a word.

An apoplectic-looking, red-cheeked gentleman turned to Rosl as the train left Spandau, and said in a strong North-German dialect:

"Well, my little girlie, they seem to have fastened up your mouth so that you can't say a word."

Rosl replied with an embarrassed smile, not wishing to appear stupid: "I come from Vienna, and I can't understand you."

The fat gentleman laughed jovially.

"That's splendid. Vienna? Isn't that where the gipsies come from?"

Rosl looked offended. She had only understood the words "Vienna" and "gipsies". Indignantly she turned her face to the window.

At the Klostertor Station in Hamburg Rosl approached a Red Cross official as her mechanic friend had told her to.

The first steamer for Harwich left in three days' time. Rosl would have an opportunity to see something of Hamburg. With five other young girls who were waiting to go to New York, Rosl was conducted round the Hansa Town by a Red Cross lady-guide. The most interesting part was the harbour. They visited Spielbudenplatz and Reeperbahn, where they saw niggers, Malayans, Indians, Chinese and other Eastern seamen, whom they stared at with open mouths.

Every five minutes the guide told her charges to beware of pickpockets, and then Rosl clutched her jacket and coat, in which she had sewed up her money.

Rosl had already realized in Berlin that she was not properly dressed. She stood for a long time in front of a fashionable shop in the Grösser Steinweg in Hamburg and almost made up her mind to go in, when she bethought herself that in London the fashions might be different.

It was remarkable that in spite of a heavy sea Rosl was not seasick. She ate with a hearty appetite—the veal had long since been consumed—and bore the sea well. She told everyone who showed any interest that she was going to London to marry her acrobatic fiancé. She could not understand how this language that the Hamburgers and Berliners spoke could yet be German. She seldom could make out a word.

At Harwich the stewardess handed her over to a railway employee who promised to conduct the young girl to the Jermyn Court Hotel in London.

Rosl clung to him anxiously. Up to now she had always been able to understand something of what people were saying to her, even if she couldn't make herself understood, but now she found it quite impossible.

Two hours later she was crossing London on the top of an omnibus beside the employee, who tried in vain to converse with her. She shrank from the congested traffic in Oxford Street, Shaftesbury Avenue and Piccadilly Circus, and breathed with relief when after crossing from the Pavilion to the Haymarket she found herself in the quiet Jermyn Street.

The hotel porter sent for a German-speaking waiter from the restaurant, who told Rosl that Mr. Gürtler was only returning to the hotel late that afternoon.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph !" cried Rosl, clapping her hands together, "you are an Englishman and speak as though you came from Lichtental."

"I am not an Englishman," answered the waiter, "and I don't come from Lichtental, but from Währing."

"That's fine, then, at any rate, I've got one person who I can talk to as I've been brought up to do."

Her countryman's face broadened. Rosl had an idea.

"Listen, Mr. Währinger, couldn't you get off for a bit and take me round the town ? I want to buy some things and I can't speak a word to these people."

In Shaftesbury Avenue Rosl bought herself some pretty clothes in the latest fashion. When it came to paying she was embarrassed. Finally she turned to her companion :

"Please will you tell the girl that she must lend me some scissors. I've sown up all my money in my jacket because of the pickpockets."

Thirty guilders was a lot of money, but she wanted to please Hartl, and certainly her Vienna clothes were neither elegant nor modern.

Rosl also bought a hat in Regent Street and was horrified when she found that she had to pay eight and a half guilders. After this she did not dare to buy any more. She returned to the hotel with the waiter and waited the whole day, without eating anything, for Hartl's return. Every now

and then she would get up and look at herself in the mirror.

She thought she looked extremely elegant in her English clothes. Certainly this girl of the people had ingrained good taste, the colour and cut of the new garments were well chosen to suit her style.

"Here's a fine to-do," thought Hartl as Rosl sat on his lap wetting his face with her tears. "How on earth can I get this eccentric little girl back to Vienna?" he saw himself asking.

"Tell me, Hartl, why don't you look at me? Do I look nice?"

"You look awfully nice, Rosl, but—but whatever will your mother say? Does she know that you have come to me?"

"Mother's dead, she was run over by the steam-tramway." Rosl began to cry. "I shall kill myself if you don't like me. Ever since I was a little girl I've been waiting for you, and I've never thought of anyone else. I could have gone out every Sunday with Karl Pschick if I'd let him take me behind the Three Bridges and carry on with me."

She was crying hard and her tears ran over Hartl's shoulder.

Her manner of speaking and the way she referred to things that most girls would not have touched upon affected Hartl curiously. He was unused to this kind of person and Rosl's personality unnerved him. A new world seemed to be opening to him. How was it that he had never guessed this before? Because he had been too young and inexperienced? These words coming from the mouth of a pure girl horrified him. Would his sisters or Mitzi have spoken like this? If he had not gone wandering round the world, he too might have remained as primitive as this. Were not simple people really happier than he? If as a boy he had remained in the Brigittenau would he have been so burdened with sadness in later years? Certainly not, he would have been able to take things lightly, as they did.

A knock on the door startled them both. Hartl pushed Rosl from his knee and stood up.

The English keeper with Puppy on a lead came into the room. The bitch jumped up at her master, delighted to see him.

"The manager of the hotel wants to speak to you, Mr. Gürtler."

"It's all right, Vic. I will be down right away."

The lad retired.

Puppy went over to Rosl and sniffed at her.

"My ! What a nice little dog you've got, Hartl. Here, here, come here, Chips. Does it come from Vienna ?"

"She's not called Chips, her name's Puppy. Excuse me a minute, Rosl, I'll be back directly."

"No, no, don't go, Hartl. I'm afraid to be left alone."

"Nothing can happen to you in this room. I'll be back in a minute."

"Mr. Gürtler," said the manager. "You must excuse me mentioning it, but in this hotel gentlemen are not allowed to take ladies to their rooms."

Hartl grew red all over.

"She is—she is my fiancée," he stammered in confusion, hardly knowing what he said.

The manager suppressed a smile.

"We cannot allow even your fiancée into your room, Mr. Gürtler."

Hartl thought for a moment, he could not at once get the better of his confusion. What on earth was he to do with Rosl ? It was already getting dark outside, he could not turn her into the street.

"Could I have a room for the lady for the night ?"

The manager hesitated and looked at the embarrassed young man standing before him and decided that he meant no harm. He nodded.

"I think that there's a room in the other wing. The lady's belongings are below, I'll have them brought up. The chamber-maid will tell you the number of the room."

What was he going to do with Rosl, Hartl asked himself as he slowly went upstairs. The girl was peculiar and might do herself some harm if he were to drive her from him and force her to return home. However, he could do nothing about it to-night, perhaps a good idea would come to him in the night ; in the meanwhile he had better take Rosl to get something to eat, for his healthy body was clamouring for food. When he reached his room he searched in vain for Rosl. Puppy lay on the sofa and wagged her tail when she saw her master. Hartl looked in the cupboard and under the bed for he thought that the girl was having a joke with him ; then he heard splashes from the adjoining

bathroom. He was horrified. He hoped to Heaven nobody would come into the room!

"Hartl," called out Rosl from the other side of the door. "May I use the white gown that's hanging on the door?"

"Yes, but it would be better to dress properly."

Her face red after her hot bath and wrapped in Hartl's bath robe Rosl came into the room.

"Oh, ah! That was good. I was so filthy after the journey, Hartl. I haven't been able to wash since I went to the public baths in Treustrasse on Saturday."

"Go and dress quickly, Rosl, I'm hungry and you too must want something to eat."

"Oh, that'll be fine, wait a minute, I won't be long but first give me a good hug."

Without waiting for the desired kiss she threw her arms round Hartl's neck and pressed him to her. Puppy gave out a little growl. Hartl loosed her arms and pulled her towards the bathroom door. The towel was already in Rosl's hand and she dried herself quickly.

"Please have my box and my other things brought up, Hartl. My comb and my underclothes are in them."

"Your things have already been taken to your room; we'll get the key in a minute."

She looked at him astonished.

"What's that about a room? Aren't I sleeping here?"

Hartl's face grew very red. He knew that it was not in any bad or immoral spirit that Rosl said these words.

"That can't be done, Rosl, you know——"

She interrupted him and came a step nearer letting the gown fall apart and exposing her beautiful virgin breasts to Hartl's view.

"Why not, Hartl, why not? We are going to get married, surely I can stay with you?"

"Hurry, Rosl, we'll talk about it over supper." Again he pushed her through the door. "Buck up."

"I tell you, Hartl, I won't sleep in another room!"

Hartl dressed as quickly as possible. His head swam. What on earth was he to do with this odd young girl?

"Hartl!" Rosl, by now in her chemise, opened the door a little. "May I use your comb and your beautiful brushes?"

"Yes, take them, but hurry up about it."

He was hurrying as hard as he could. His head was whirling madly. How was he to begin? He kept thinking

about the girl's rosy neck and breasts, and was furious with himself for being so easily seduced.

"Hartl!" Rosl came out of the bathroom, "please fasten up my blouse behind, my fingers are so stiff."

His fingers trembled and he breathed heavily.

"Listen, Hartl, can't we just go to a wine-bar and have a sausage and a bit of smoked ham?"

His smile irritated Rosl.

"Why are you laughing at me? What have I done?"

"There aren't any wine-bars in London, they don't grow wine here."

"Oh, how smart you are, Hartl, such a lovely suit and a white shirt and a beautiful tie. You know you're much better-looking, Hartl, than you used to be. Do I look nice, Hartl; are you pleased with me?"

"Of course you look nice, Rosl. I could hardly recognize you. Who made those clothes for you in Vienna? Was it my sister, Rosa?"

"Oh, what an idea! I bought them in London. The hat, too. Do you like it?"

He was astonished, and she told him about the Viennese waiter who had accompanied her and helped her to buy them.

Before they went out, Rosl asked for another kiss and this developed into a dozen.

The little fox-terrier bitch watched her master in amazement. He was hardly paying her any attention to-day. Usually he talked to her all the time, telling her of his plans, but to-day he had hardly looked at her. Who was this feminine creature whom he allowed to fondle him? Surely this was not Miss Bella?

Hartl took Rosl to Scott's underground room. Puppy took up a position close to Hartl.

"Oh, Hartl, this is a wonderful place. What a lovely leather sofa, and so much light." Her eyes fixed themselves on the table-cloth. "Tell me, Hartl, why are there so many knives and forks?"

"Rosl, don't talk so loud or everyone will look at us."

He ordered a large lobster, Scott's speciality.

"Oh, my, what an awful animal! How red it is."

It was only after much persuasion that she followed Hartl's example and tasted it. Then she smacked her lips.

"It tastes fine with this white sauce."

"That's not sauce, that's mayonnaise."

A glass of sauterne made Rosl very talkative and she chattered on gaily. Hartl now asked after his mother, sisters, brother and Mitzi. Rosl pursed up her mouth when she had to speak of Mitzi.

"Oh, stop talking about that conceited creature, Mitzi. She goes to High School where she learns everything. She's so well-educated that she can read English and French! And doesn't she just hold her nose in the air!"

Rosl pushed up her snub nose with her forefinger.

"She'll come to a bad end, that silly girl!"

"But Rosl——"

"Just you wait, Hartl," she took a hearty draught of wine, "just you wait. She's ready for anything—and she's cracked about you, too. Fancy, she guessed that I was coming to you, and shouted after me at the street door. That shows what a sneak she is."

"But, Rosl, what are you saying? Mitzele was never a sneak, you mustn't speak of her like that!"

"Do you want to make me sick? Anyway, don't call her Mitzele, I can't stand that." She caught sight of the waiter who was carving an enormous steak. "Goodness, that's quite raw—it's oozing with blood."

"It's meant to be like that. If you don't like it, I'll order something else."

"I'd be quite happy with a couple of sausages with gravy, or a smoked sausage as long as I can be near to you and see your dear face."

"Why didn't you tell my mother that you were coming to me?"

"I'd have liked to have told her, only I didn't dare."

"Weren't you afraid of the long journey?"

"Not a bit. I'd already found out exactly what I had to do. You know, Hartl, I'm rich. I had some luck in the lottery and made quite a lot of money. I can buy my wedding-dress and veil and underclothes and shoes all with my own money."

Everything was whirling in Hartl's head. In vain he tried to find a way out. How could he explain to the girl that he did not love her and did not want to marry her? If only there was someone who could help him!

The enormous ice with cream and mixed fruit took Rosl's breath away. After three spoonfuls, she raised her

eyes, pressed both hands against her chest and licked her lips.

"Oh, Hartl, don't talk to me, just leave me in peace. My, but this is good! I must eat it alone, you shan't have any of it."

He only nodded. What a child she was. How natural and simple! He remembered a book he had once read. It was written by an Englishman and was called "Complicated Characters". While reading it he had thought of Juanita, but had that poor creature really been so complicated? She had been caught in a trap and was tied to a man simply in order to earn her living. He, a pure animal, had exploited her talents and used her as a bed-companion; there had been no question of love. Was it to be wondered at that, passionate woman as she was, she should seek to fill the gap in her lonely heart? In such cases sensuality is an opiate.

Hartl looked at Rosl; she was still eating her ice, washing it down with draughts of wine and looking at him from time to time. Her eyes looked happy, her face was rather red.

"Lovely, lovely, Hartl! It's nearly finished now, but I'll not leave a drop of it."

How pretty she was! Not only pretty, but really beautiful—all that was needed was for her cheeks to fill out a little and her body to become a little firmer. He fell again into thought. She was such a child of Nature, there was so little subtlety in her. She had waited for him for six years, had not even seen him for five, and yet still loved him. But was it love? He hesitated over the word. Was this real love? Love that could suffer and endure patiently? Pure, innocent, romantic love? It was certainly not just sensuality, for she had been brought up in a society where girls and women did not take the surrender of themselves to be a very serious matter. In Brigittenau they gave themselves in early youth to anyone they fancied who swore eternal fidelity. Often these vows scarcely outlived the first surrender. The lads often brutally told the girls this as soon as they had satisfied their desire. They would laugh at the silly girl and talk of their success vulgarly to their companions.

Such experiences had evidently not yet come to Rosl. She was too natural to hide it if it had been so. All these

years she had kept herself pure, and had refused all advances. And yet, though so simple in some ways, she could be very subtle. The only really simple soul who had crossed his path, the only really pure heart who could love without expecting any response, had been poor little Bella.

His meditations brought Hartl no nearer to a decision. He would have to sleep on it, perhaps in the morning he would see some way out.

As she got up from the table Rosl took Hartl's glass and drank the remains of his wine.

"It's too good wine to be wasted like that."

As he guided her to the stairs a young man with a wisp of a moustache winked at her as she passed his table ; she put out her tongue and made a face at him. Fortunately Hartl did not notice.

"What is the number of the lady's room, please ?" Hartl asked the porter when they returned to the hotel.

"Number 329, in the other wing."

"Why have you got two keys, Hartl ?" Rosl asked as she followed him, a little uncertain about the knees for the strong wine had had its effect.

"Come along !"

They went up in the lift.

"Your number is 329, Rosl. Your things are already in your room."

"I don't want another room. I want to sleep with you."

He spoke very gently.

"Rosl, be calm, we can't do it—it's not allowed in this hotel, only married people are allowed to sleep in the same room. It's not allowed by the police."

"In the Seven Houses plenty of people live together without being married and no one says anything, only silly old women fuss about it."

"Be sensible, Rosl, in the morning we'll see what we can do about it."

"How horrid you are, Hartl, you don't love me a bit !" She began to cry. "You might at least give me a nice good-night hug."

He kissed her and she went into her room.

"Another hug, Hartl."

He kissed her again, then hurried down the stairs.

Hartl breathed with relief when he found himself in his room. Puppy was in the bathroom and he could hear her

lapping some water from a saucer. Hartl turned on the bath taps and undressed quickly. Puppy ran into the room and jumped on to the bed. Hot and cold water splashed into the bath.

After Hartl had had his bath he stood under the cold douche, and then feeling much refreshed got into his night-shirt. He brushed his hair, put on his dressing-gown and went back to his room. To his horror he saw that the screen had been pulled back from his bed and that Rosl was lying in it.

"Don't be cross, please, Hartl. I am afraid to sleep up there by myself."

He could find no words, but stared at her in perplexity.

"Don't make such a long face, Hartl, be kind to me."

"Either you get up and go to your room, Rosl, or I must go away."

"I can't go like this, I've got nothing but my nightgown on."

"Good Heavens, what simplicity," thought Hartl, and asked her :

"Did no one see you ?"

"No, I was very careful, and hid when I heard anyone coming."

"Well, I'll lie on the sofa, and we'll talk about it in the morning."

Rosl was silent, she realized now that Hartl really was angry.

He put out the light.

Puppy sat on the bed and tried to pierce the darkness with her clever eyes. She was puzzled why her master did not come into the bed as he usually did at night.

Hartl lay on the sofa and thought about things, he could hear Rosl crying. Puppy jumped down from the bed and came over to Hartl.

"Hartl, Hartl !"

"What do you want ? Go to sleep, I'm tired and I've got to get up early."

"Please don't be angry, Hartl. Come here, I want to talk to you, you can easily sleep here. Please Hartl, I'll behave nicely, only don't be cross with me because I do love you so much."

He got up, pushed aside the screen, and sat on the edge of the bed. Now was the moment to explain everything

to her, to tell her that she must return home the following day, for he had no intention of marrying her. He wanted to tell her all about his life, to explain to her that he could only bring misfortune, sometimes even death, to all who loved him. He would tell her about how Bella and Juanita had died, and warn her that she must fly from him. In his naïveté he did not realize this was just giving Rosl the opportunity that she longed for, that, indeed, it was an appeal few women could resist.

"Now listen to me, Rosl, you must let me talk to you, because I want you to understand everything."

"You use such fine language it makes me quite afraid——"

In a low tone Hartl told her his story, how he had been guilty of unkind behaviour to his parents and caused them much unhappiness, how he felt that he must atone for it.

The bitch had followed her master, jumped on to the bed, and settled herself in his lap. He went on with the story of his wandering life.

Rosl felt along the bed-cover, found Hartl's hand and pressed it gently. Her eyes were wet, she felt unspeakable sympathy for her beloved.

"Everyone I come into contact with meets with misfortune. Little Bella died, and so did Juanita. It was all my fault. I bring bad luck to people, and I daren't risk it with you Rosl. You must go home."

The inevitable happened. The story had the opposite effect from what Hartl had hoped. Rosl sat up, threw her arms round his neck, and wept on his breast. "No, no, Hartl, I won't leave you. You need someone to look after you, and I will stay with you always. You'll come to a bad end if you go on like this. You can't!"

He weakened, carried away by self-pity. Under the spell of Rosl's white arms, the warmth of her body, the close contact, all strength went from him. Yes, he certainly needed someone, she should remain with him, perhaps he would learn to love her. He sank on the pillow beside her. She kissed the tears from his eyes, his mouth sought hers, they clung to one another, and time and space were forgotten in the old and yet eternally new love song.

The white fox terrier lay at the lovers' feet, her head on her paws, her faithful impenetrable eyes trying to pierce the darkness. She heard the broken stammered words of

the two children in the bed, and it seemed as though she sighed. Was she only jealous, or could it be that she guessed that further troubles were in store?

"My dear, darling, beloved Hartl!"

Soon peaceful breathing was all that was to be heard, for the lovers were asleep.

Providentially or capriciously, Fate had tied two human creatures together who were fundamentally different in every way.

CHAPTER THIRTY

WHEN Hartl woke the next morning he looked at the sleeping Rosl with a bewildered expression.

From the foot of the bed Puppy was looking expectantly at her master. Since the days of the hammock she had always lain beside him. How was it then that someone else had dared to usurp her place? Slowly she crept up to her master's side, feeling that he needed some sympathy.

Hartl stroked her head thoughtfully, then he looked again at the girl by his side. How deeply she slept! She was smiling in her sleep and her lips were a little open. He asked himself whether he loved her now that he had possessed her. Surely what he felt for her was not love.

It had been pure madness that had taken hold of him last night when he had lain in her arms, a sudden longing for Vienna, a feeling that this girl could give him what he had missed for so long. Could he send her away now, could he push her from him after he had made her his woman? He sighed.

Puppy put her nose into Hartl's hand and he took the little animal on his knee and stroked her. He could not stop thinking of all that had happened, and wondering what would come of it all. This was the beginning of a new chapter in his chaotic life. How would the matter solve itself, which road was he going to take? Was he doomed to bring suffering and privation to this young creature? There was no question but that after what had happened that night he must marry Rosl. And yet he had qualms about it. Dared he do it? Was he not much too young? Ought he not first to do something for his mother before

he undertook any fresh obligations? And as to Rosl, was she really the right companion for his life's journey? She was still so young, who could tell whether her love for him was really of the kind that lasts? Yet there seemed no way out, for he did not want to be a cad.

Rosl turned round and opened her eyes in astonishment. She saw Hartl, remembered what had happened, and went very red. She pulled up the bedclothes and hid under them.

Hartl was embarrassed. He was about to leave the bed, when he felt his hand seized and from under the clothes he could hear Rosl's voice. She was sobbing.

"Hartl, I am so ashamed. Whatever did I do yesterday?"

He bent over her and pulled the clothes from her face. Her tears softened his heart.

"Don't cry, Rosl, don't cry, it's all right."

His lips touched her hair and wiped the tears from her cheeks. She pulled him to her and whispered in his ear:

"You don't think any the worse of me, do you Hartl? You know I love you so much and have waited for you for so long. Do you love me? You aren't cross with me? You don't think any the worse of me?"

He felt he must show her some affection, must say something nice to her. He smoothed her hair tenderly from her ear, put his mouth close and sang in gentle tones:

"I'm so very fond of you,
I'm so tender hearted;
Let me be your lover still,
And never we'll be parted."

It made him think of poor little Bella to whom he had sung the same song. She had taken it with her on her long journey into the Valley of Eternal Silence. In this case the song ought to usher in a new and lovely mutual happiness for two young creatures were starting off on life's road together. He thought to himself that if there really was another after-life, pale little Bella might yet help him on his path through life interceding for him with God that his luck might remain with him.

Rosl was deliriously happy. She had her boy, her Hartl, whom she had waited for so many years, she pressed herself close to him and put her arms round him.

She held him in a long embrace.

Hartl lay by her with exhausted lips.

"Rosl, you must love my Puppy too, as much as I do."

The bitch pricked up her ears when she heard her name mentioned. She sat up and looked at the unfamiliar scene.

"Of course I love it. I love all dogs."

She beckoned and Puppy came nearer and hid herself behind her master's back.

"She'll have to get used to you, Rosl, you are so strange to her. She's always been alone with me."

"Jesus, Maria and Joseph, I've just remembered! My God, my God!"

Hartl was alarmed.

"Whatever is it? What's wrong with you?"

"Isn't to-day Sunday?"

"Yes, it's Sunday."

"It's the day that the *Magazine* and the Jew come. How he'll curse."

"What are you talking about?"

"You know, a few months ago mother bought a lot of things, and some linen, on tick. She had to pay fifty kreuzers a week and the Jew comes every Sunday to collect it."

"You'll have to write and say that you'll send it."

"But I don't know where he lives or what his name is. To-day too the *Magazine* will come, you know, about the poor seamstress, whose father was really a prince, but she didn't know it because the wolf-countess—you know that's a sort of beast—because that wretch of a wolf-countess, you know, didn't want her to return to her father, and then Gaston, you know Gaston, he's a Frenchman, who had already killed a lot of people, you know, he bribed the housekeeper to let him rob Esther, you know, that's the poor seamstress, and then take her to the wolf-countess's castle and shut her up in a dark cellar, because the wolf-countess wants to marry the prince—you know, she isn't really a countess—you know——"

Hartl laughed heartily and put his hand on Rosl's mouth.

"You and your *Magazine*, we'll stop all that Rosl. I've got much better books for you."

When Hartl got up he saw a telegram lying on the table that he had not noticed the night before.

"Is Rosl Stollhof with you. Wire answer at once. Mother."

An hour later the reassuring telegram was speeding over the Channel, past Embden, Cologne and Munich to Vienna, announcing that Rosl had arrived in London yesterday and that further news would arrive in a letter to Vienna shortly.

Rosl sat beside Hartl on top of the horse-omnibus and looked at everything he showed her. To-day there was no sign of the usual lively hubbub of week-day life in Oxford Street or Holborn High Road. The city was empty, and deathly still. It was a typical London Sunday.

"Rosl," Hartl looked at her, "you've never asked me how I earn my living, whether I've got a job."

"No, I quite forgot about that. Do you still fly through the air in your beautiful silk tights?"

"No, I haven't done that for ages. I had an accident in Bucharest and have never done it since."

"Well, what are you doing? Do you still live on the money Mr. Chiesi left you?"

"No, Rosl, I earn my living in a rather more dangerous way. I train wild animals, and I must warn you that I might get hurt one day."

"God, what kind of beasts are they? Lions or elephants?"

"No, panthers, pumas, jaguars, leopards."

"What are they like? I've no idea. Are they big?"

"You'll see them soon."

"Have you ever been bitten?"

"Not yet, and I hope I never will."

"You must be very careful, I'll be awfully anxious about you."

"No, no, Rosl, just the opposite. Look at Puppy. I've never hit her in my life and she'd do anything for me. I've got my own system."

"System? What's that? Is that a wild animal?"

"Silly child! I train my animals by my own method, no beatings, only kindness."

Puppy lay between them and willingly allowed Rosl to stroke her. Her head was lying on her master's knee.

"In what theatre are you working? Can I come one evening?"

"I'm not showing yet, I'm not quite ready. There's an agent coming at eleven to-day to watch a number."

"A number ? Is that something to do with a lottery ?"

"Rosl, all the turns in a variety show are called 'numbers'. Hold your thumbs for me and wish me luck."

"Why must I hold my thumbs ?"

"That's just a superstition. But listen, Rosl, when the gentleman comes, you must stay quite quiet and not talk to me, otherwise perhaps the animals won't behave well and I won't get an engagement. I must get one soon for the animals' food costs a heap of money every day and there are other things as well."

"Will you be as rich as Mr. Chiesi in time, Hartl ?"

"I hope so—we must get off now."

Hartl took Puppy under his arm and preceded Rosl down the steps of the omnibus.

"Goodness, how queer it is here, and how it stinks !" she said, as they went through the dark court to the store-house.

"'Morning, Vic, 'morning, Tom, let me introduce you to my fiancée, Miss Stollhof."

"How do you do."

Puppy jumped into her basket, Hartl put a chair for Rosl next the bitch.

"Now, Rosl, sit still and don't disturb me."

"Hartl," Rosl spoke in a low voice, "can't I kiss you ?"

Hartl quickly brushed her lips with his, he felt a certain pride at having overcome his hesitations and announced himself as about to be married.

"Light !" called Hartl.

Tom switched on the reflector, and screwed it to the proper angle.

Now Rosl could see the big cage and the exercise area behind it.

The sound of animal hissing and the clank of iron rods came from behind. Vic and Hartl went into the cage and started arranging the pedestals. The floor was strewn with fresh sawdust. Hartl wore a grey frock-coat and a top hat, Rosl was greatly impressed. How splendid Hartl looked ! There was surely no one like him.

"Let the dogs in !" commanded Hartl.

Two large dogs rushed into the cage and jumped up at Hartl.

"Ready ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, in with them !"

The iron doors were opened with a tremendous rattling. Tom stood at the side of the exercise area. A pair of green shining eyes appeared in the darkness. An enormous striped panther came solemnly out.

"Go on, Tip !" encouraged Tom.

"Come on, Tip !" shouted Hartl, and the animal stepped into the central cage and sprang smoothly and almost noiselessly on to a bench fixed to the side of the cage.

One after another, twenty-four beasts walked, ran or jumped, according to their different temperaments, into the training cage, and, without any difficulty each took its place on the bench.

Hartl, accompanied by the two dogs, now came to the railings, and Vic handed him a leather satchel with shoulder straps through the bars.

The young trainer went from animal to animal handing each of them a piece of meat from his satchel.

Rosl sat and stared at the cage with wide open eyes. She could not have said a word. The sight of the slim young lad, his slightness intensified by his frock coat, armed only with a stick, and surrounded by twenty-four beautiful spotted or striped beasts and the two magnificent dogs, moved her strangely. Instinctively she felt in the basket which stood on a box near by, lifted Puppy, and took her on her lap.

"Go ahead, Vic, play !"

Victor began to play a Viennese waltz on a cornet. It was Strauss's "Frühlingstimmen".

The music went straight to the young girl's heart and she began to hum the tune, but she stopped horrified as soon as the beasts began their exercises. She longed to run into the cage and snatch Hartl into safety, but she remembered his instructions and remained trembling in her seat. Nervously she stroked the little animal on her knee, who remained quite still, never taking her eyes from her master.

While the final trick was taking place, consisting of the beasts jumping over Hartl's head and then surrounding him, Rosl had to bite her knuckles to prevent herself from crying out in horror and fear. She hardly dared breathe and silently prayed for Hartl's safety. Only

when the animals sat again in their places could she breathe again.

Hartl came to the side of the cage.

"Do you like it, Rosl?"

It cost her an effort to say "yes". Some inner voice told her that she must not let him see that she was frightened.

"It's lovely, Hartl, wonderful. If only the folk in the Seven Houses could see it!"

Mr. Richard Warner and his colleague Braff, the well-known London variety agents who had associations all over the world, came into the hall.

"Hallo, Gürtler, old boy! You've got a fine collection here. Gosh, they're splendid specimens," called out Mr. Braff and extended the tips of his fingers to Hartl.

"If they perform as well as they look, old boy, there'll be big money for you."

Hartl put a hand through the bars, but Mr. Warner remained some little distance away.

"I will shake hands afterwards."

Vic brought two chairs for the new-comers.

"Go ahead, Vic, give us a little music."

The waltz sounded hoarsely from the cornet, and the rehearsal began. The amazement of the agents grew from trick to trick. What they were seeing was so original and so surpassed all other performances of this type that both gentlemen forgot their usual professional phlegm. The animals seemed to know that they must do their best and worked with a greater precision than ever before.

As the last trick began Hartl spoke to the beasts and they immediately jumped right over him. Mr. Braff let his cigar drop from his mouth and Mr. Warner drummed nervously on his knees with his fingers.

"Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!"

Rosl, forgetting all Hartl's instructions, shouted and clapped her little hands together.

The agents turned round in their seats astonished. In the darkness they had not noticed the girl. Then they, too, clapped their hands and applauded.

After the animals had been taken back to their own cage, Hartl, rather red in the face, came out. He wiped the sweat from his brow; Warner went up to him.

"Well, well, Mr. Gürtler, I congratulate you. You have

got the finest animal act that has ever been shown on any stage or in any ring."

"What Mr. Warner says is quite true, Mr. Gürtler," seconded Mr. Braff, "I don't know what engagements you have in view but if you like you can perform at the Empire a fortnight from Monday for four weeks. How much do you charge?"

"If you'll allow me, Mr. Braff, I'll come and see you in your office to-morrow, at four o'clock. But I should require you to make it eight weeks?"

"All right, my lad, we'll talk about that. I'll expect you at four to-morrow."

"There doesn't seem anything more for me to do," said Mr. Warner looking offended.

"Excuse me, Mr. Warner, but haven't you got anything abroad for me?"

"I have, Mr. Gürtler. You can have eight weeks at Koster and Biall at old Oscar Hammerstein's in New York, and then perhaps 'Keiths' and the 'Orpheum Circuit' in the west. Let me know to-morrow how much it will all cost and send me some pamphlets and photographs."

"They're being prepared now."

Rosl had come up with Puppy in her arms. Hartl was in high spirits. He felt that Rosl had brought him luck. He took her by the hand and led her to the agents.

"May I introduce my fiancée?"

They looked at the girl appraisingly.

"Does she speak English?" asked Warner.

"No, only very little,"smiled Hartl. "But you gentlemen speak good German, you especially Mr. Braff."

The agents shook Rosl's hand.

"Would it be too much to ask you gentlemen to be witnesses at our wedding?"

"With the greatest pleasure——"

When the agents had gone Hartl pulled Rosl to him and for the first time kissed her of his own accord, and danced madly round with her.

"Rosl, little girl, sweetest, you darling, you've brought me luck as well as love!"

"Oh, Hartl, you are so much nicer when you talk just naturally like this!"

"Vic, come here! You know London well. When we've

had something to eat will you go to the West End and look for two furnished rooms in a decent house and come back to my hotel at seven o'clock to tell me what success you've had ?"

Hartl handed half-a-crown to the lad.

Rosl poked him in the side.

"Why do you want two rooms?" she whispered. "I want to stay with you."

He winked at her.

"Because of what people say. You can be with me; but we must have two rooms for the sake of convention."

In the afternoon Hartl and Rosl took a cab and drove out to Golders Green. There they wandered about on the grass, made plans, kissed each other and returned to London very happy. Now Hartl firmly believed that he loved Rosl, and that it was only that he had not realized it until now.

"I'm not going to sleep alone," Rosl threatened as they sat next one another in the cab, "I tell you that."

"No, no," he calmed her.

At seven o'clock Vic joined them in the hotel and asked Hartl to come with him; he had found two lovely rooms in Soho Square kept by a German lady. They were also cheap and the young lady could cook if she wanted to.

Rosl was very pleased with the rooms and Hartl paid two weeks in advance. The landlady, a South German, made a good impression on the young people, and they moved in that same evening. It did not take long for Hartl to pack his things and Vic brought them along in a cab.

"But to-day we'll go again and eat some of that terrible red beast, Rosl, you know, at Scotts, where we went yesterday."

"Yes, Hartl, and we'll have some more of that lovely wine, won't we, and some more ice ?"

A few days later Hartl signed on for his first engagement entirely on his own.

He was to perform for eight weeks at the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square at a salary of £100 week. It was the highest sum ever paid for an animal performance, as Mr. Braff assured him. Two weeks later came the evening of the first performance.

During those days long telegrams were sent to America by Mr. Richard Warner's office, offering the greatest animal

performance ever seen in an American theatre. The offer was made for 750 dollars a week and passage paid.

After he had signed the agreement Hartl, Rosl and Puppy betook themselves to the registrar's office at St. Pancras in order to make arrangements about their marriage. They discovered that they would have to wait eight weeks.

These were blissful days for Hartl. He and Rosl were continually happy together, and little Puppy found that she had to take a back seat in her master's affection.

Every day Hartl practised with his animals in order to perfect his show. The Empire management allowed him to use the stage for his rehearsals a week before the first performance.

Hartl had asked to be allowed to do this. He made arrangements with the conductor that he should have a portion of the orchestra and rehearsed complete with light and music. The management sent an invitation to the Press, who gave first-class notices of the sensational originality of his turn and published long interviews with the young tamer. Enormous posters showing Hartl surrounded by his animals were stuck on railings, walls and stations, and an imposing series of pictures of the group of wild animals was posted in front of the Empire and in the foyer.

Hartl had ordered a beautiful evening dress for Rosl in addition to her bridal dress, street and house clothes. This she was to wear on the first evening of his performance. Mr. Braff and Mr. Warner had invited her to watch the show from a box.

A letter arrived from his mother in Vienna. She was perturbed over Rosl's behaviour and could not make out why she had been so secretive about her journey; if however, Hartl wanted to marry Rosl and felt quite happy about it, she was not the one to stand in his way, although she considered that they were still rather young. She would go to church the day of their wedding and pray for them. Emilie, Rosa, Mitzi and Adolf sent their best wishes. Herr Höllriegel had been ill, otherwise he and Frau Loisi would have come to London for the wedding, and if his health were to improve he might yet come.

Frau Gürtler went on to beg Hartl to write to her all about his doings. She was very glad that he was no longer working at that dangerous flying through the air. The long

letter, which had been a great labour to her, closed with wishes and blessings for both of them.

At last the great evening came. Rosl remained with him in the dressing-room, seeing that his make-up was all right and that his clothes looked well. Hartl was rather agitated but he held himself with dignity. He kissed Rosl and admired her. She was a real little lady to-night. It was remarkable what good taste in clothes the simple little factory-girl from the Brigittenau had. The Regent Street dressmaker had answered to his astonished questions: "She has excellent taste, one can see that she's a lady."

The long train worried Rosl a little, but otherwise she carried her clothes well. During the last two weeks she had visited several theatres and variety shows with Hartl and observed all the well-dressed women. In the restaurants too she took note of all Hartl said to her, and observed all that went on around. There was only one thing she found a little difficult, and that was to refrain from kissing Hartl on every opportunity.

Vic came into the dressing-room wearing a brand new uniform. Hartl gave him some final instructions.

"The iron forks must not be seen, Vic, tell this once again to Tom. Put them in the wings and only use them when absolutely necessary. Hold the end of the water hose in your hand all the time so that the animals can see it, then they'll behave themselves for they hate the water. Go into the box now, Rosl, and hold your thumbs. Vic, after to-morrow, we've got an afternoon performance every day."

An English comedian was performing in front of the stage while behind the curtain the great iron cage was brought to the back. The audience were excited. They were curious to see this great original animal number that had been advertised so much during the last few weeks.

The orchestra struck up Strauss's waltz "Frühlingsluft".

Rosl sat in the box between the two agents. Her hands clutched on to the velvet parapet and her lips trembled. She suddenly remembered that Hartl had told her to hold her thumbs, and she quickly did so. She had already picked up a few words of English, so she lifted her little fists and said:

"Please, make drücken with me."

The men smilingly clenched their thumbs.

The curtain parted. Hartl stepped from the cage and bowed. The audience was very still and the music played gently. The audience watched the performance with ever-increasing attention. The number of the animals alone would have attracted attention and their great beauty astonished all. They were splendid specimens. Each trick seemed more wonderful than the last, and that all this could be accomplished without whips or shooting of pistols impressed the onlookers immensely. The danger to the young trainer was obvious and respect for his courage grew every minute. They clapped every trick and there were roars of applause during the last part of the performance. Hartl had to come again and again before the curtain. His number had been an amazing success.

Rosl, weeping and clapping, shouted from the box. Hartl smiled up at her from the stage.

Braff and Warner each received an uninvited kiss from Rosl, then she hurried to the back of the stage and nearly smothered Hartl with her embraces.

Puppy sat in her travelling basket and watched everything. She had become reconciled to Rosl, but could not understand what all this singular behaviour on the part of two young humans was about.

The marriage of the famous trainer was no secret from the Press, any more than was the sudden arrival of the beautiful Frau Loisi Höllriegel with the convalescent Herr Xaver.

Frau Höllriegel was astonished at Rosl's good taste in clothes, and Herr Höllriegel marvelled at the young factory-girl's talent for languages, for in two months she had been able to learn enough English to get along quite well in conversation.

Hartl had many questions to ask Frau Loisi ; he admired this woman immensely, had done so in fact ever since he had been a little boy when he used to gaze after her open-mouthed. He was delighted with the good wishes of his mother and sisters, and the little presents she brought him from them. Frau Gürtler had sent Rosl a few lines blessing her and begging her to take good care of Hartl. Milli and Rosa were looking after Rosl's home. Every fortnight they dusted it and gave it a good cleaning. They thought that it was only necessary to scrub the floors every two months as no one stepped on them.

Rosl wept as she skimmed through these letters full of good wishes, greetings and kisses. She vowed in her little heart to always do what Hartl wanted, without waiting for him to tell her.

Mitzi had written a short friendly letter to Hartl wishing him every happiness on his path through life, and begging him to remember that there was a girl in Vienna who was always thinking of him and praying for him. She sent her best wishes through him to Rosl.

The Höllriegels did not tell the young couple that ever since the news of Hartl's approaching marriage, Mitzi had been ill and that nothing would rouse her. On Frau Gürtler's advice Hartl's sisters had not mentioned it in their letters.

Frau Loisi was sorry for Mitzi, she guessed the reason of her illness and spoke to Frau Gürtler about it. The two women agreed to mention the young people as little as possible so as not to add to Mitzi's soreness of heart. Frau Gürtler, too, would have rather seen Mitzi in Rosl's place. The women could only hope that time would heal the wound.

Frau Loisi spoke rather sceptically to her husband about Rosl, but he laughed at what she said.

"You seem a little jealous, Frau Höllriegel. Perhaps you would have liked to have married Hartl yourself?" He put his arm round her waist, while, wrapt in her dreams, she gazed through the window of the Hotel Cecil overlooking the Thames.

"Dear Xaver, I know that you are laughing at me, but you can say what you like. There's something in little Rosl that hasn't come to the surface for all her effervescence. What if it shows itself one day?"

"We'll hope not, Loisi. What amazes me is how that child of the people has learnt in two months how to behave like a little lady. How did she manage it?"

"It's in the blood of a good many Viennese, you can see it also in Hartl, who's much better-dressed and cultivated than most artistes."

It had rained hard for a week, but now this typical London weather ceased and the sun came out on the day of the wedding.

Mr. Billy Woodbridge, a carriage-maker in whose premises the bridegroom had rehearsed his animals, supplied the carriage and the flower-decked whips.

The inhabitants of the house all collected in front of the door to see the bridal couple. According to an old English custom they were going to throw rice and what was cheaper, barley, and even an old boot at them to bring them luck.

Hartl suppressed a curse as a heavy male boot hit him in the back and Rosl screamed at the shower of rice and barley. The women cheered the bride and the men exchanged knowing glances.

Hartl had only eyes for Rosl. He would never have believed that it was possible to love his little bride as much as he actually did. If after his first night with her he had had qualms and doubts whether he really loved her, all that had disappeared now, and he was growing to care for her more and more.

Undoubtedly he loved Rosl, loved her in the way that a young man loves for the first time in his life. It was not the same kind of passion that had drawn him to Juanita. He loved Rosl with all the ardour his heart was capable of. She filled his thoughts entirely. He was always thinking of how good and kind he must be to his bride. He dressed her like a little princess, bought everything of the best for her, gave her a trousseau fit for a girl in the very best society. Almost half his weekly earnings went entirely to Rosl.

The little Brigittenau lass was swimming in a sea of happiness. It would have sufficed her only to possess Hartl, all else she would willingly have renounced. Her bridegroom's presents brought her great joy. She noticed what ladies in Society considered to be in good taste and had a sound instinct for what was beautiful. Within eight weeks she had managed to grow quite fluent at English, although she still made a few mistakes.

Hartl was astounded at Rosl, who very soon forebade him to speak German to her. When he asked her a question in German she answered in English. If anyone laughed at her English she would at once demand an explanation of her mistake. She spent all her spare time studying the language and made remarkable progress. She was also extremely interested in Hartl's work, particularly its more commercial side. She wrote Hartl's business letters and dealt with the horse-slaughterers and milkmen who supplied him with food for his animals. She discovered a big firm who were willing to sell Hartl old oxen at almost the

same price that he had hitherto paid for old horses. She bargained over every penny, and was able to save him quite a lot of money.

She had one characteristic that made Hartl tremble a little for the future peace of his marriage—she was jealous. She kept a close watch on him when they were walking together or were in company.

Girls and women ran after Hartl. A trainer too has always a certain attraction. The brutal virility that can subdue a troupe of wild animals has a fascination for the feminine sex.

All the papers printed articles about Hartl and his method of work and interviews with him. The fact that he was kind to his animals and never took whips into the cage won him the sympathy of the animal-loving English people. He was the man, or rather the boy, of the moment. His picture, with or without his pets, appeared daily in the papers. The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals gave him a diploma signed by many well-known people.

The result of Hartl's popularity was that many women visited the theatre not merely to see the animals, but tried to speak to him before and after the performance. Their admiring glances were as poison to Rosl, and she experienced a stabbing pain in the breast whenever she saw one of these distinguished ladies talking to Hartl and showing an interest that did not extend only to his animals and his performance.

"You shouldn't look so intently into the women's faces when you talk to them, Hartl, not into their eyes like that —otherwise I shall scratch one of their eyes out."

Hartl laughed at Rosl when she made these scenes, and propitiated her with kisses, but when these outbreaks became a regular occurrence it set him thinking.

"Dear Rosl," he said to her once after a terrible exhibition of jealousy, "I love you so much, so very much, as much as a man can love a woman. I'm not a fickle kind of person and you are my only sweetheart, my loved one, no one else exists for me. Do realize this and don't make life too difficult for me."

"But you shouldn't look them in the eyes like that when they talk to you."

"Silly child, I look everyone in the eyes when I talk to them. I don't think anything of it. Don't you trust me ? Don't you love enough for that ?"

When Hartl put this searching question to her, she embraced him through her tears.

"I could eat you with love, Hartl, I'm only afraid that some day you'll love somebody else."

Hartl's reputation, spread abroad by favourable Press notices, brought agents from all over the world clustering round him. Letters and telegrams arrived offering hitherto undreamt-of salaries for animal shows. The Empire Theatre asked him to extend his engagement for another two months, and Braff arranged for him to travel through England, Ireland and Scotland with the "Moss Thornton Tour". His salary was raised by twenty-five pounds a week, and all his railway expenses including that of his animals and assistants were paid. A clause was added to the contract to the effect that the management had the right to extend it after the four weeks was up at the same terms.

"Barnum and Bailey", the "Wallace Show", "Keiths", "Proctors" and the "Orpheum Circuit" offered long contracts at high prices if Hartl would come to America after his English engagements. Director Richards tried to secure Hartl for his forthcoming three years' tour in South Africa, India, etc. Monsieur Forbé, the asthmatic agent of the "Folies Bergères" in Paris came several times to London to try to lure Hartl into an engagement. Berlin, Vienna Budapest, St. Petersburg, Moscow etc., sent agents and telegrams. Hartl did not close with any of them, Braff and Richard Warner had the prior claim on him, as they had been the only agents who had even answered his letters when he first came to London.

The future was full of good prospects for Hartl and Rosl.

The young couple arrived early at the Registrar's Office in St. Pancras. The doors were not yet open, so the wedding-party repaired in high spirits to a neighbouring bar.

Hartl's eyes shone with love and joy when he looked at Rosl. How beautiful she looked in her bridal clothes, how proudly she looked round her! How the folk in Brigittenau would stare if they could see Rosl and Hartl now! The aunts, those dear aunts, who had prophesied that he would end up on the gallows, and whom he could never make understand that there was something better in life than being a clerk; if they were to see him now they would certainly clasp their hands over their heads and cry in

smothered accents that the child must surely have become a thief if not a regular burglar.

The Registrar made Hartl and Rosl hold hands. Mr. Warner stood beside the bride and Mr. Braff next the bridegroom, Herr and Frau Höllriegel watched from a little distance.

Rosl said her "yes" in loud almost exultant tones, and Hartl spoke equally clearly. The young bride was very astonished when the registrar asked for a kiss. That is customary in English Registry Offices.

Rosl snuggled close to her husband as they drove back to the wedding-breakfast that Mr. Höllriegel had ordered in the Savoy Hotel. The new Frau Gürtler posed with great pride before some photographers who had got wind of the affair and stood ready to snap them as they came from the office.

"What fun, Hartl, I'll appear in the papers and then I can send them to Vienna."

Hartl had a surprise during the wedding-breakfast. Rosl had to leave the table suddenly, and Frau Höllriegel accompanied her. Rosl was violently sick and Loisi asked the young woman whether perhaps she had eaten something that disagreed with her or drunk too quickly. Rosl denied that she had, and said that she had been vomitting like this for some days.

Loisi's eyes widened significantly. She asked a few questions and without showing any embarrassment or astonishment she explained to Rosl what was wrong with her.

Hartl hardly understood what his wife was whispering in his ear.

"What are you saying?" he asked.

"I'm going to have a baby," she whispered again in his ear.

He looked at her astonished.

"Are you sure? Who told you?"

She laughed, pinched him in the leg, and whispered again:

"I'm going to have a baby, that's why I've been sick so often lately and feeling so bad. Frau Höllriegel has just told me."

Hartl could hardly believe it. How had it happened? He sat wrapt in thought and was quite taken aback when Mr. Warner rose to toast him and humorously admonished the young husband to see to it that the race of humane

trainers did not die out, but rather multiplied so that their father's fame would be carried throughout the world.

Hartl was very much embarrassed. He turned somewhat indignantly to Rosl and asked:

"Have you told him anything?"

She laughed heartily and, unabashed, kissed him behind the ear in front of their guests, whispering:

"How silly you are. How could I have told anyone when Frau Höllriegel only told me a minute ago out there?"

He could not make it out, returned the toast, then clinked his glass and sat staring rather foolishly in front of him.

Frau Gürtler and Frau Loisi Höllriegel sat by Mitzi's bed, and looked vainly to each other for counsel. For weeks the invalid had lain in an apathetic condition without speaking a word, only staring at the ceiling, taking passively what medicine and food were proffered her, paying no attention to questioners or comforters.

To-day Loisi had come to talk seriously to the girl. Mitzi was invited to accompany the Höllriegels to the Riviera and Egypt. "Now stop being an idiot," said Loisi. "Be sensible, and pull yourself together. What good can it possibly do to you to lie hunched up like that?"

"Mitzi," Frau Gürtler said kindly, "Mitzi, I've had enough pain and trouble in my life—please don't add to it. Do you want a great sin on your conscience? Do you want Hartl to fall into his melancholy again through hearing that you've gone to pieces on his account?"

The girl fixed her large eyes on the white-haired lady and sighed. She had not thought of that. Yes, it would be a load on Hartl's conscience if he learned that she had died for his sake. She looked from Frau Gürtler to Loisi, and in her face, as well, saw looks full of pain and fear. She began to realize that she was causing great pain to those who loved her. Had she any right to bring such suffering to others, who had brought love to her? She must be monstrously selfish. And then, was Hartl worth all this love? He had immediately joined up with Rosl when she reached him in London. Maybe they had long since arranged matters between them. Such thoughts mounted in her again and again, only to be rejected. No, Hartl was not bad or false. Rosl must have thrown herself

round his neck, and he had been inveigled. She reproached herself for not having thought of secretly going to London. If she had done so, Hartl would certainly have fallen in love with her.

"Mitzi," Frau Höllriegel began, "to-morrow you must go with me to Bittmann and Zwieback in the Kärtnerstrasse. We will buy you some nice clothes, and get them fitted, and next Thursday we'll leave for Abbazia."

"Yes, Aunt Loisi." the girl whispered. Then she threw her arms round Frau Gürtler's neck and broke into floods of tears. Why, oh why, was it forbidden to her to marry the man to whom she had given her heart from childhood? She vowed to renounce this disastrous love, and to do everything to repay those who cared for her, returning them good for good.

In the passage Adolf, Hartl's brother, was seated on the window ledge. He looked inquiringly at Loisi as she came to the door. "Does Mitzi agree?" he asked, "is she going with you?"

"Yes, Adolf, she's coming, she's found her senses again."

He nervously played about with his overcoat lining and asked her: "Are you going to be away long, Frau Höllriegel?"

"Probably the whole winter. The doctor says my husband needs warm weather."

"But will Mitzi come and live with us altogether again in the spring?"

Loisi looked at the boy. His distress pained her. Why were all these people involved in love tragedies? Was there a curse on this house, and on the Seven Houses, which had suddenly fallen into such misery? In the rest of the neighbourhood true and heartfelt love was unknown. Intimacy, intercourse, marriage and concubinage were known. It was partly custom, partly convenience, which held these people together, As for love, the word was used as an excuse for the satisfaction of raw appetites. Warmer feelings were unknown. If one partner died, the other went into mourning. Honest tears were shed, too, but the great heart's pain at loss of a beloved being was almost unknown. A hard life from childhood up had embittered their hearts, and only a primitive instinct for self-preservation kept the poor creatures together. Primitive as their whole life, was the spiritual bond between them.

Loisi knew these people of the Seven Houses well. They were just like the people in other outlying quarters of Vienna. They might quarrel and squabble and come to blows, but they held together. Very seldom was a man unfaithful to his wife, and still more seldom a wife unfaithful to her husband. Not moral principles, but physical and spiritual poverty kept them apart. Hard work and the multiplicity of children deadened all desires in the women at an early age.

The men, too, with their narrow outlook, had no inclination for adventures. They had too little time, and it did not occur to them to desire other women. One was quite enough. The refinements of the senses were unknown to them: their animal desire was satisfied by the woman who was their own. When she died they promptly found another. For physical beauty they cared little. They preferred fat women with soft bodies.

These people had no more taste in clothing than in love. Fashions were slow to change in the suburbs. For years the men had stuck to the same mode of dress, and were slow to accept innovations. The girls and women were somewhat more mobile, but they, too, had but little taste.

Loisi could not explain how she herself, Mitzi, Hartl and Rosl Stollhof had experienced true deep love and suffered accordingly. They were spiritual oases in the desert of ugly and uninteresting convention. And now Adolf, the quiet boy who devoted himself wholly to his job as a mechanic, and had as his principal ambition to attain a high position in that calling, he, too, had experienced the love that pains the heart. Loisi had long noticed it. She knew that Adolf loved Mitzi, and was eaten up with misery because she had given her heart to his brother, and never noticed his own love.

"Adolf, don't torment yourself so. God may yet change Mitzi's mind for her. She can't remain for ever in love with Hartl. Some day she will see that it's senseless to have no room in her heart for more than one. Now he's married, and she will have to forget him."

"She won't forget Hartl, Frau Höllriegel, I know Mitzi —I have no luck in this world, everybody's in love with Hartl."

Frau Höllriegel nodded, and wondered to herself how it could come to pass that all hearts went out to this serious

fellow, Richardl Gürtler. She herself was drawn by every fibre to him. It was not that he had done anything to excite her. Women simply caught fire as soon as they came near him. He never spoke of love. Never in his life had he paid court to a woman, but they all desired him. What secret, inexplicable fluid was it which commanded the affection of everybody, men as well as women? Had he been a conversationalist, an orator, a man of superior intelligence, she could have understood it. But it was neither intellectual nor striking physical advantages that marked him out from among his fellow-men. Loisi concluded that this was one of those riddles of human existence which could never be solved.

"Frau Höllriegel," said Adolf, looking bashfully to the ground. "May I ask you often to talk about me to Mitzi? Possibly God will take pity and change her mind."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

IT would have been hard to point to a happier marriage than that of the young trainer. Hartl felt like Happy Hans. Puppy, the fox-terrier, now and again got kind words, and was still allowed to sleep in Hartl's bed, but her master no longer told her tales, or spun out fancies for the future, such as in former years he had kept exclusively for the ear of his companion through those long travels. Puppy often sidled up to her master and fastened her big faithful eyes on him, seeming to say: "What have I done that you no longer love me as much as you once did? I'm as good as ever; I haven't lost any of my love for you, and I shall go on loving you as long as there's any breath in my poor canine frame." If Hartl then stroked Puppy's head, the bitch forgot all her vexation and was thankful for the smallest mark of appreciation.

Rosl suffered severely in pregnancy. Her young body was weakened by years of insufficient nourishment. After eight months of marriage she gave birth to a weakly boy in Glasgow, whom they named Xaver, after his godfather, Herr Höllriegel. The young wife absolutely declined all proposals that she should go to London or Vienna for her delivery. She would not be separated one hour from

her beloved, and travelled with Hartl week by week, from one town to the other, till the last day. But it cost her much suffering and physical weakness.

Frau Gürtler now came from Vienna, accompanied by her younger daughter, Rosa, in order to be with her daughter-in-law as her son desired. The old lady, already in her sixties, had never travelled farther than between Vienna and the Viennese Forest, and two days and two nights of travelling taxed her sorely.

She was met in London by an employé of Mr. Braff, who spoke German. He accompanied them to a small and homely hotel, took care of them the whole day, and next morning put them both in the express to Glasgow.

Hartl was waiting for his mother and sister on the platform. The old woman could hardly recognize her son in this powerful young man. Amid tears she embraced him, while Rosa shyly stared at her brother, who was a complete stranger to her.

Hartl was deeply disturbed at the sight of his white-haired mother. He saw how deeply she had suffered, and was seized by qualms of conscience for the part he had had in occasioning this.

Frau Gürtler was happy. She stroked Hartl's hand over and over again, forgetting all the years of pain and distress, now that her darling child Hartl was again at her side. All her worries and heart-ache now seemed unreal. If the hour of death came she could meet it with equanimity now that she had seen her child again.

Rosl kissed her mother-in-law's hands and cheeks. "Frau Gürtler, mother, you can't think how happy I am that you've come. All the fear of death that has plagued me for months has gone now. As long as you're with me, mother, I can't come to any harm."

Frau Gürtler and Rosa were much struck by the change which had come over Rosl. Despite her pregnancy she looked beautiful, and in these months she had put on a good deal of flesh. Moreover, her expression was refined, her large grey-green eyes seemed to have become more intelligent. Mother and daughter were surprised at the choice language in which Rosl expressed herself. No sound in her voice now betrayed the Vienna dialect, while she spoke English fluently.

On the very evening of Frau Gürtler's arrival Rosl

gave birth amid great pain. The doctor had good grounds for fearing that she would not escape with her life, but Rosl rapidly recovered.

As old Frau Gürtler did not leave her daughter-in-law's bedside, Hartl had no difficulty in keeping the nature of his occupation from her. He didn't want his mother to see him at work, and thenceforth suffer agonies of apprehension for him. He invented the fib that he now did stage-floor acrobatics, which were not dangerous. He took his sister to the theatre and impressed upon her that she must say no word to his mother about the animal number.

Rosa sat in the first row of the stalls, looking very pale, and fearful for her brother's life, while he exhibited his animals. On the way home she promised to say nothing to her mother about what she took to be Hartl's extremely dangerous way of life.

The young mother was very weak, and thus it was not very surprising that she paid little or no attention to the child, hardly ever inquiring for it, and turning her face when it cried.

Frau Gürtler was moved to melancholy thoughts. She had had seventeen children, and each time, after hearing the first cry of the new-born baby, had never let it from her side. The young mother's attitude seemed unnatural, and she was distressed each time the baby began to cry. She had then immediately to call the nurse, an Irishwoman, who was always chattering to the servants, and was much annoyed when the old lady put the suckling in her arms.

Two days after Xaver's birth, Hartl had to travel to Edinburgh. The parting from Rosl was painful. She didn't want him to go, and implored him to wait for a week and to put off his engagements. That would have meant losing all his English contracts and paying heavy fines. So it was arranged that Rosl, his mother and sister, and the nurse should all meet him in Edinburgh two weeks later and proceed with him to London, where, after two weeks' holiday he was due for another season at the Empire Theatre.

Rosl had many questions to put to her mother-in-law. She wanted to know what the folk in the Seven Houses had said to their marriage, and if they had chattered much about it, and whether that ass, Karl Pschick, had

been furious, and how Mitzi was. As she asked this, Frau Gürtler noticed for the first time in her daughter-in-law's eyes a curious, furtive expression, which, if not wicked, was at all events not quite honest. Frau Gürtler shuddered. She had known Rosl from earliest childhood, and never noticed anything bad or crooked in her. Was there, after all, an evil streak in the girl?

When Rosl heard that Mitzi was in Abbazia with the Höllriegels, she made a wry face, and said: "Well, perhaps she'll find someone to marry her and make her forget Hartl." Frau Gürtler said nothing.

In London, Hartl had to use all his persuasive power to make Rosl move to Brighton with his mother and sister. The child was delicate, and the mother was very weak. The doctor whom Hartl called in suggested that sea air would do them both much good. When Rosl still refused, Hartl forcefully insisted that she must comply and do her best for the child. The young wife thereupon broke out: "Anyway, the child's not more sick than I am, and I come first."

The last words were spoken in Viennese dialect into which Rosl had now relapsed, forgetting all the distinction of manners she had acquired during the last months.

"Do you mean you're not fond of our child?"

"Well, it takes away the love from me. Nobody thinks of anyone but Xaver, and you never even look at me."

She burst into tears. Hartl was in consternation. He simply could not take in what his young wife said to him. Could there be such a thing in the world as a mother that did not love her own child? He thought of Sultana, the jaguar, who had given birth to two cubs a few weeks before, and looked after her young with the greatest care, never letting them, for a moment, out of her eyes. In great distress he asked: "So you don't care for our baby; you're jealous of your own child, are you?"

She saw that she had gone too far. Her eyes filled with tears. "Don't you see how ill I am?" she asked. "Don't you see I need some love, too?"

He begged her pardon. "Rosl, don't be angry. I forgot you were sick. I won't hurt you any more."

In Brighton the young wife recovered her health. In two weeks she had sufficiently recovered to go up to join Hartl. Every Monday she travelled up to London with

him and stayed there a day or two, while her mother-in-law and the nurse minded the child, which still required a doctor's attention.

A new dissension broke out between them when Hartl told Rosl that he had bought a little house and garden out at Sievering for his mother. In some annoyance, Rosl replied: "You fairly fling money about. Must your mother really leave the Seven Houses? She's lived there long enough and always been content. Don't you ever think about ourselves?"

He looked long at her. He had lately begun to understand that Rosl was made of other stuff than himself. She had passed her childhood with a sick, vexatious mother and had never known what mother's love was. She couldn't be blamed if the beautiful love of childhood had remained unknown to her.

"Listen, Rosl, you know I care more for you than for anyone. And you know I am earning a lot of money. If my luck lasts only three years we'll be rich people. Look me in the face, Rosl; I don't recognize you like that. You give something to every beggar, and I, after bringing so much trouble to my mother, want to do everything in my power to make her last years happy. She's had very little happiness in her life, and now I'm going to put her out of the range of anxiety. Much as I love you, I'm not going to let you talk me out of this."

"It's always your family, over and over again. Aren't you going to get a house for each of your sisters and your brother? And don't forget Mitzi, who's so keen on you. You'd better get her a villa straightaway."

Hartl took up his hat, called Puppy, and made for the door.

"When you've come to your senses, Rosl, we can go on talking. So far, we've lived like two turtle doves, and I've no talent for quarrelling."

She threw herself on the sofa and bit her handkerchief. Why couldn't she hold her tongue? Why was she so horrid about Frau Gürtler, who had done so much for her? With tears in her eyes she went after her mother-in-law, who was on the sands with Rosa, the nurse, and the child. She threw herself on the sand, seized the old lady's hands, and kissed them with hot lips.

"Mother, mother, forgive me, I was so nasty about

you to Hartl. I don't know what's wrong with me. The devil must have got into me since Xaver came into the world. Please, mother, tell Hartl to be kind to me again; I'll never be so hateful again."

Frau Gürtler stroked Rosl's hair maternally, and sighed. She knew that marriage was not all delight, and had experienced it herself when the family fell into poverty years ago and they hadn't known where the bread for the children was coming from.

"Don't be so excited, Rosl; Hartl isn't hard on you. He's awfully fond of you, and reads what you want in your face before you ask for it. Only don't squabble with him."

"No, never again, never in all my life will I say another angry word to him. Please, mother, you tell him that. But he must be nice to me again, otherwise I'll die."

Hartl willingly forgave her, but a new restlessness had come over him some days before. As he had always done, he confided his woes to Puppy. In the dressing-room at the Empire Theatre she sat on a stool and watched her master rubbing paint on his face. She growled a little. Hartl looked towards her. "Yes, Puppy, one seldom gets a couple to agree like we two do. We two are at peace with all the world."

Puppy grunted. She might not understand the words, but she knew her master was confiding his grief to her.

"Why do human beings make life so hard for each other?" Hartl murmured to himself. "They have such a short time to live on earth, and they poison it with beastly words and deeds. How fine life would be if men were reasonable and tolerant."

After Hartl's last performance, Frau Gürtler came to London with her daughter. She was overjoyed at the present of the house at Sievering. "If only your father had lived to enjoy it!" she said.

Hartl set up Rosa in clothes, while Rosl ran round Regent Street and the Haymarket to find lovely presents for Emilie and Adolf. At Charing Cross Station Hartl smuggled another little package into his sister's hand. "Give that to Mitzi, with my best love," he whispered into Rosa's ear.

"Hartl," Rosl called out, "have you packed up those presents for Herr and Frau Höllriegel properly?"

Frau Gürtler looked long into her son's face. An inner voice told her she would never see him again. His contracts would first take him round England and America, and then he would repeat the great tour round South Africa, India, China, Australia, and New Zealand, with the Richards's Circus, just as he had done with Mr. Philadelphia. She had been three months with the child of her affliction, and that was long enough. She knew he was happy with Rosl, and hoped that the young woman would get quieter and more peaceful in course of time.

"Take care of yourself, Hartl, and write to me often. Every line is a consolation for me."

"Yes, mother, I'll always be writing to you now. You'll never have cause to complain again."

Rosl, too, wept hot tears on taking leave of her mother-in-law.

"Be sensible, Rosl," the old lady said. "There's never any happiness save when two cling together. Discontent makes an end of love, and then unhappiness soon follows in its train."

As the train moved off Hartl ran the length of the platform to see his mother's face as long as possible, so that she, too, might have him by her a few seconds longer.

In quiet reserve Hartl walked home by Rosl's side. A melancholy feeling arose in him, as though his happiness had gone from him with his mother.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

HOURS—days—and years passed by. Little Xaver got no better. He remained a quiet, weakly child whom a little draught, or a change in temperature, which a healthy child would not have noticed, qualified for the sick bed.

Hartl had bought a little country house at Ottensen, the suburb of Altona, on the Elbe. While he was performing at Hornhardt's in the Spielbudenplatz, Rosl and Xaver had simultaneously sickened. Though three years old, the child looked only two. The doctors said it would die if it were not under constant medical observation.

There was a serious discussion between them when Hartl insisted upon Rosl taking up a fixed residence with the child. He declared this was necessary, not only for Xaver's health, but also for his upbringing. All Rosl's protests were without result. The house at Ottensen was bought and done up in good taste by the new owners.

At the end of the month Rosl moved with her child into the new home. Hartl was to start on his engagement with Richards's Circus.

Two weeks of life together in the little house, with its view from the garden on to the ship-crowded Elbe, were idyllic for the little family. Xaver quickly recovered, and rushed round the garden, while Rosl gave herself entirely up to the love of Hartl. She was as much in love with him as in the days when she had plucked unnumbered kisses from his lips on the banks of the Danube Canal. The young husband, too, was as much as ever in love. He clung to her with every fibre of his heart, and dreaded the thought of years of loneliness.

His contract with Richards's Circus was for three years. After that Hartl would begin his second tour through the United States, which would account for another year, while the "Orpheum Circuit" in America had obtained the option of keeping him on for another year. Thus, he might be separated from Rosl for five years. Hartl feared that he might not be able to stick out this seeming eternity alone. He and Rosl agreed that if the baby remained healthy, she should come and visit him in India for a few weeks with Xaver. She was also to bring the child on a visit to him in America.

Hartl stood a long while at the railing of the ship which was to take him to South Africa. He looked at his wife and child, who were pursuing the great liner down-stream in a hired motor-boat which danced in the swirling waters. Rosl stood beside Miss Simkins, Xaver's governess, who a year before had taken the place of the Irish nurse. The Englishwoman had Xaver in her arms. Rosl threw kiss upon kiss up to the deck. She kept on calling love-words and bidding Hartl to write at least twice a day. Tears poured down her cheeks; but she paid no attention to them, determined only not to lose sight of her husband a moment sooner than necessary.

Puppy lay in Hartl's arm and barked cheerfully at his

playmate, Xaver, down below. She had made friends with the child, and had given him her affection. Now she thought they were just having a game. Hartl had to cling tight to her to prevent her from falling overboard and swimming to her little friend. The pain of the parting deeply afflicted the tender-hearted animal trainer. He saw difficult days ahead, and clenched his teeth so as not to let Rosl see his distress. He outshouted Puppy's barking with hearty good-byes to wife and child.

When Süllberg came into view, the motor-boat made for the landing-stage at Blankenese. Hartl saw Rosl collapse on the bench by the railing. He kept his place till the landing-stage, with Rosl, Miss Simkins, and Xaver, had disappeared. Then, with heavy steps, he repaired to his cabin and sank on the little plush sofa. Puppy raised herself to his knee, and carefully scratched with her paws. As in former days, when in distress, he took her in his arms and pressed his cheeks against her silky hair. Puppy lay quietly, only drawing her tongue from time to time across her unhappy master's hair. She was delighted that her master had found his way back to her. Instinctively, she sympathized with him, and tried to alleviate his suffering with faithfulness and devotion.

The setting sun was mirrored to stern in the Upper Elbe. Seagulls circled round the ship and dived, with hoarse screechings, after the food remains and offal thrown out by the cook's mates. The sun was a red ball, half-hidden by clouds, edged with purple and gold. In the distance appeared the windmills in front of Cuxhaven, and the "Alte Liebe" lighthouse rising sharply behind the pointed roofs of the houses.

The distance between the two lovers grew from moment to moment. But the severance was only in space; their souls remained together; their thoughts broke through time and space and held the two hearts linked in one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE heart of little Mitzi Stiegler was filled with her love for Richardl Gürtler, a love she guarded with virgin hands like some sacred treasure in a costly shrine. She fed her emotion with an almost unhealthy

ardour, living within herself and quite unconscious of her surroundings whenever her thoughts were with the man she loved. Space, time, and the rest of humanity would disappear, and she seemed to live in a dream-world where she and her lover wandered in eternal bliss. He would sing her love-songs, and his soft low voice mingled with the music of the spheres. She would feel his arms round her, his lips against hers. For hours every day she would dream in Frau Gürtler's little garden at Sievering. When she looked at Hartl's mother she seemed to see her beloved ; in her voice she heard his words. She remained impervious to all advances from Adolf or any other suitors.

Hartl's brother, Adolf, loved Mitzi—and suffered. He knew about her love and, from time to time, renewed his proposal. He begged her to be his, promising to support her with his own hands and to make her a little paradise on earth. His mother, Loisi, and Xaver Höllriegel encouraged his proposal, but their efforts were in vain, Mitzi declared that she was very fond of Adolf but that her affection was not strong enough for her to listen to him.

In the twilight of a winter afternoon, in the Höllriegel's country house, Mitzi confessed her love for Hartl to Frau Loisi, and explained that she could never love any other man, far less marry him.

Loisi understood the girl. She remembered what she had suffered through her love for Ferdl Stiegler. She knew what it meant when a serious young girl consecrated her heart to one man. She thought of how she had suffered for years before finally her love for Ferdl slowly faded. If Ferdinand Stiegler had not killed himself but had gone on living she would certainly never have given herself to another man.

Old Frau Gürtler also knew about Mitzi's love for Hartl, and was very tender with the girl. She would rather have had Mitzi for a daughter-in-law than Rosl, but she did not grudge her son the happiness which appeared in his letters which arrived punctually every week. Sometimes she tried to induce Mitzi to accept Adolf. Then Mitzi's eyes would grow large with horror, and she would plead not to be disturbed any more. His mother found it odd that Hartl never forgot to send Mitzi greetings in his

letters. She asked herself whether some secret bond really tied the two young people together in spite of the great distance between them. Frau Gürtler took care not to send any special wish from Mitzi to Hartl when she wrote, and only finished up with the sentence: "We all send you best wishes, and don't forget to give our love to Rosl and Xaver."

When Frau Gürtler heard that Hartl had started on his big tour through South Africa—her son had asked her to write so that he would receive the letter when the ship stopped at Aden [sic !] she closed with the lines: "Best wishes and greetings, too, from Mitzi." Why she did this she could not have said, some fundamental instinct urged her to.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

"NOTHING for you, Mr. Gürtler."

Hartl walked thoughtfully from the circus office-van to his own tent. He could not understand why the post had brought him no message from Rosl. He had had no news for two weeks ! Up to then, every post from Europe contained ten to fifteen letters for him. At the beginning of his tour he had received cablegrams almost daily, bringing him kisses and a few lines of greeting from Rosl. What was happening in Altona ? Could it be that his wife or Xaver was ill ? He could not stop worrying about it and, fetching his bicycle from the animal-tent, he started off for the telegraph-office in Cape Town. There he cabled to his wife that he was anxious on account of her silence and expected an immediate reply.

Rosl's answer came two whole days later.

"Letter coming. I and Xaver well. Thousand kisses. Rosl."

Hartl looked at the cable again and again, and read and re-read the words. He was tortured by anxiety. Why had Rosl not told him why she had not written for so long ? He wrote daily, so that she received regularly two letters and five postcards a week. He had never

missed a day. Rosl, too, had always stuck to this arrangement, only at the beginning she had sent extra letters and postcards, sometimes two a week.

Once the young wife had told her husband that Xaver had been poorly, and that she had been too busy with him to write much. She had passed that summer with the child and Miss Simkins in Travemünde, and ever since her news had been scanty. Not only did she write less often, but her letters were shorter and entirely different from the earlier ones.

Hartl felt that the reason must still be Xaver's health and he told Rosl to engage a hospital nurse to help with him and so save herself.

It was almost a year since he had seen his wife. His love for Rosl had grown even stronger since his absence. He thought of her continually in his spare moments. He always answered his mother's letters as soon as he received them; he wrote to Mitzi; and regularly sent post cards to Herr and Frau Höllriegel, nor did he forget his sisters, but Rosl's letters were always a fountain of refreshment to him. They were original, genuine, charming, and full of humour, for Rosl had remained a true child of Vienna in spite of her wanderings.

Hartl knew these letters almost by heart. He took great care of them, keeping them in packages and taking them out when he had a free moment and re-reading them.

He read Mitzi's letters, too, with great attention, for he knew about her feeling for him; he answered them in a friendly, affectionate way, but was careful to avoid saying anything that might awaken any false hopes in the young girl's heart. Despite himself, he found himself drawing comparisons between Rosl and Mitzi, but whenever he did so, he quickly changed his thoughts, calling himself a fool and, taking out Rosl's photograph, he would look at it tenderly. Then all thoughts of Mitzi would disappear.

Once when his sister Emilie wrote to him that Adolf was paying court to Mitzi, he was seized by a strange emotion. He was surprised to find himself thinking ill of his brother, ascribing to him all kinds of faults, and hoping that Mitzi would not listen to him. Immediately after, he felt very ashamed of himself, and could not

understand why he was so moved by matters that ought only to have a superficial interest for him, leaving his real emotions untouched.

There had been an understanding that Rosl, who had repeatedly told him that she could not stand the long separation, should join him in Bombay in a few months, but of late she had hardly mentioned this project. Nevertheless, he still put this down to Xaverl's illness.

Only three more months had to pass before Hartl saw his wife and child, and he was counting the days and hours. He had secured a first-class cabin for Rosl and Xaverl and a second-class ticket for Miss Simkins six weeks ago, and now he cabled to Altona to ask whether he should also get a ticket for a hospital nurse.

As Hartl visited the towns where he had been with Mr. Philadelphia, old memories rushed in on him. He went to the little hotel on the Krugersdorp Road where he used to meet Juanita, and could hardly believe that he had ever had any woman in his arms besides Rosl.

Poor Juanita! When the ship had touched at Lisbon on its way to South Africa he had landed and gone to find the Mexican woman's grave.

The grave lay under some diminutive palms, and was adorned only by a simple and rather rickety wooden cross. For a small sum Hartl arranged for a stone cross to be put in its place. This passionate woman had given her life for his; he owed her a debt of gratitude.

With folded hands he had repeated the Lord's Prayer over the grave. For years he had said no prayers, never visited a church, nor bothered about religion. It was not that he had lost his faith, for faith was deeply implanted in him, was indeed part of his very flesh and blood, but even as a boy he had never had much use for church. From earliest youth he had disliked any form of ceremonial service.

Hartl had some flowers planted on Juanita's grave, and left enough money with the cemetery attendant to keep it up for ten years.

The window on the first landing in the little hotel on the Krugersdorp Road stood open. Up there he had lain in Juanita's arms, kissed and received her hot kisses, had fancied that life would be impossible without her. It seemed incredible now that he had wanted to die when

Juanita had left him. How was it possible for a man to change so much?

If this feeling for Juanita had not really been love, was it love that tied him to Rosl? Was not this, too, perhaps a mere delusion of the senses? He pushed such thoughts aside. Rosl was his wife, the mother of his child, she loved him, and he loved her with every fibre of his heart, he was ever tortured by the thought that she might be snatched from him.

His memories brought him back to poor little Bella. Whenever he saw a white number 28 on a yellow caravan he seemed to see Bella before him. He always pictured her as she had lain in her long invalid chair.

Once a terrible thought took possession of Hartl. It suddenly occurred to him that Bella and Juanita, two women who had loved him, had both died on his account. What if this were to be Rosl's fate? He shuddered at the very thought and tried to laugh at his fancies.

During the voyage from Mozambique to Bombay, Hartl walked restlessly up and down the deck. He did not mix with the other artists who called him conceited and thought him rather crazy because he read books that romances nor novelettes. These people could not understand how anybody could read such dull and incomprehensible stuff, of no practical value to him, books in which there was no mention of love, death, mortal fights, or even of mild scuffling.

Old Grunato first snatched a book out of Hartl's hand and read its title: "Critique of Pure Reason".

With a grin he told the occupants of the smoking-room that Mr. Gürtler was certainly cracked, as he was reading a book that dealt with lunatics. For if anyone talked of "pure reason" he was bound to be a fool.

Some of the older performers, impressed by Hartl's work, took his side. Up to now, his number had never been surpassed, for years other trainers had tried to copy him, but so far they had only succeeded in making miserable traversties of his performance. They could not get on without whips, and their feeble minds were not capable of gaining complete mastery over the beasts.

The performers were jealous of this young man, the "head-liner", who was the star turn, whose name came

first on all the placards and programmes, who had illustrated brochures of his work handed gratis to the audience, and who was always puffed up by the Press. He was very unpopular, and when, as sometimes, tired with his own society he sought to mingle with the other performers, conversation ceased at his approach as they grudgingly made room for him.

The result was that he sought their society less and less and lived among his animals and books. He became a brooder, ill-at-ease with his fellow-men. He only talked to Puppy, telling her of his troubles, of the meeting with Rosl, which was now so near, speculating how big little Xaver had grown by now, and sometimes, overcome with emotion, he would take the animal in his arms and kiss her forehead and throat.

The little bitch would look at Hartl, her clever eyes shining with gratitude. She knew that her master was worried and unhappy. If she had been able to speak she would have urged him not to count on the goodness and fidelity of mankind, but to trust only the dumb animals who give their love without malice and without self-interest and in whose primitive minds there is no room for duplicity. It was in return for man's wickedness that God gave him the power of speech and understanding, and he used it to intensify not brotherly love but hatred and distrust. The weapons of the dumb and silly animals—claws and teeth—could never inflict such terrible, endless pain as can the tongue of man.

In bright moonlight the steamer traced its path over the Indian Ocean; Hartl leaned over the railings gazing at the white foam it left in its wake. The sea in the moonlight looked like a shining silver street. The sky was filled with a thousand stars. The Southern Cross, that certain guide to the seafarer, outshone all else. The sea was still as glass and looked as though it could never be troubled again.

From time to time Hartl looked nervously at his watch. Only a few hours now separated him from Rosl. As soon as he saw her dear face, all his troubles would vanish. He was stopped in his walk by a cable, coiled ready to throw out to land. He was a prey to gloomy, troubled thoughts. Why could he not be gay like other young people. He ought to laugh! There in the East

a loving wife awaited him patiently. Certainly the meeting would bring him great happiness, yet here he sat and could feel no glimmer of joy. He got up with difficulty and went on to the deck. All was still. The throb of the engines made the ship tremble, the funnel discharged thick black smoke into the tropical night. Above on the bridge the officers walked to and fro, their glasses were focused on land. Soon the lights of the islands should be visible, the great lighthouse with the intermittent light on Malabar Point, south of Governor's Island.

Hartl remembered the time that he had visited Bombay coming back from Australia with Mr. Chiesi. The ship had lain for two days in harbour.

His master had sent for a guide. An old Parsee had accompanied them. They had visited the holy city of the Hindus, where the silent begging fakirs, with their fanatical eyes had terrified Hartl. The towers of silence, the mysterious Parsee homes of the dead, with their flocks of ever-circling vultures had made an inextinguishable impression on him.

Rosl should see all these things; he would explain everything to her. On their early travels she had willingly gone with him to museums and listened to all he had to tell her. He had patiently answered all her questions, some of which were very naïve. He would enjoy opening her eyes to the mysterious charm of India.

He was very tired, but he would not rest until he had seen the lights of Old Woman's Land, then there would only be seven hours until the ship dropped anchor.

The passengers were due to land at ten o'clock in the morning. It was nearly three, the lighthouse would surely soon be visible. Hartl looked fixedly into the distance. A large brightly-lighted steamer of the Norddeutscher Lloyd passed by. There was a dance taking place on board, the strains of a Viennese waltz came across the water and awakened old longings in Hartl. As he turned his eyes again towards land a milky streak of light flashed across the dark sky. It was the light of Old Woman's Land, and now Hartl could go to his cabin. First he put everything in readiness for the morning, then threw himself into his bunk and slept soundly.

Puppy's eyes shone in the darkness of the cabin. The

bitch sat upright by her sleeping master. Questioning and mysterious her eyes roamed over him. What was she thinking about? Did she guess what was in store for her beloved master? Did God grant a knowledge of things to come to the beasts that He withheld from man? Certainly it seems at times as though their senses were sharper.

The rattle of chains, muffled sounds, the patter of footsteps on the wooden promenade-deck awoke Hartl from his slumbers.

Puppy stretched herself, yawned, and came as usual to say good morning to her master and to wheedle him into scratching her head and neck.

It was eight o'clock. Hartl was horrified to find that he had slept so long. Everybody else was doubtless already on deck. Rosl would be waiting for him anxiously and impatiently. He washed quickly, put on his white suit, and hastily packed his bag. He swore at Hermann when he came into his cabin, but the steward assured him that no one had yet landed, and the English Customs officers had come on board to go through the usual formalities with both humans and animals.

Upstairs, the scene was animated. For hours the crew had been hard at work. All the hatches were open, and from the derricks great rope nets were suspended on chains. The donkey engine clattered as they were lowered into the holds.

From below came the noise of stamping horses, trumpeting elephants, braying asses, barking dogs, cursing keepers, and roaring felines. The four-footed passengers sensed the approach to land.

When Hartl pressed Rosl in his arms all his worries and qualms were forgotten. He had hardly recognized the elegant lady under the white sunshade for his wife.

Rosl's figure had filled out a little. Her beauty was of no ordinary kind, she could only have come from Vienna or from the United States.

Pride was mixed with the young tamer's joy at seeing his wife look so lovely. The other artistes stared at the young woman despite their own preoccupations. The female members of the circus at once started criticizing Rosl, saying that she was much too made-up and gave herself airs, as though they were not as good as she,

The manager shook the young woman warmly by the hand. "I'm glad that you've come to cheer up your husband a bit. He always goes about with a face as long as a poker," he said.

"Where's Xaver?" In the first moments of reunion Hartl had quite forgotten his son.

"In the hotel over there. He's lying down as he hasn't quite got over the long journey."

Hartl silently marvelled at his wife's perfect high-German, in which only from time to time a suspicion of Viennese could be detected in the shape of a few low-German words. He felt vaguely perturbed and unsettled. How she had changed in a year and a quarter! Which of her surroundings, whose influence had worked this change? He fiercely told himself not to allow himself to start brooding again. What a sombre creature he was becoming! Could he not be happy for a moment?

Xaver looked shyly at his father when he came to the bedside, but when Hartl took him in his arms the boy returned his father's kisses. "Mamma, Papa hasn't got a moustache like Uncle Kurt."

"Be quiet, silly child, and say that piece of poetry I taught you."

The child was silent, and looked anxiously at his mother.

"I can't; I've forgotten it."

That afternoon Hartl was busy attending to the lodging of his animals out in the Mazagon, behind the Botanical Gardens, where the circus had pitched its tents. The cages, the exercising area, with its apparatus and pedestals were set up, and the vans moved off, so as to give the beasts a chance to move about with greater freedom.

Rosl, who in former days had never left Hartl's side, now begged to be allowed to remain at home, saying that the noise of the circus got on her nerves. He did not urge her, and took Miss Simkins and Xaver with him. The governess kept looking at the young tamer as though she were about to speak to him, but when her glance fell on the child she seemed to pull herself together and remained silent.

Hartl was worried. Rosl, his Rosl, who had loved him ever since her schooldays, who had proved her fidelity by pursuing him and compelling him to love her until he found that he could no longer live without her, this

Rosl had disappeared and a stranger had come to him from over the sea.

Even in their most intimate moments Hartl felt that she was not the same as she used to be, and asked her what had happened to make such a change. She flew at him:

"What's wrong with you? What are you grumbling about? You go on looking at me like that, why don't you seem a little pleased to see me?"

"I am pleased to see you, but you are so changed, so entirely different, that I've got to get used to you."

He stroked Puppy, who lay on his lap. Rosl saw red, and looked angrily at Hartl.

"Did you make me come all the way to India in order to grumble at me? What do you want? Aren't I good enough for you?"

She had fallen into the Vienna dialect, and all her culture was forgotten.

"I'm not grumbling at you; can't I say what I feel?"

"You're so used to shouting at your beasts that you think that everyone has got to jump to the sound of your whip. You care much more for that miserable dog than for your wife and child!"

He had not taken his eyes from her during this outburst, and his amazement grew each minute. What had come over her? This woman in no way resembled dear little Rosl Stollhof or the young Mrs. Gürtler whom he had left only a little over a year ago.

His horrified expression increased her fury; she went up to him with clenched fists.

"I won't have that dog in my room, it can go with the other beasts!"

Puppy got up slowly on Hartl's lap. She wrinkled her nose and gave a little growl.

Hartl stood up. He held his pet in his arms and looked gravely at his infuriated wife.

"You don't know what you're saying and doing, Rosl. For God's sake——!"

Without waiting for an answer, he left the room. He met Miss Simkins and Xaverl in front of the Victoria Hotel, and the child ran towards his father and jumped up at him.

"Papa, Papa, look what's here! They're English

officers, Miss Simkins says; they're not so finely dressed as Uncle Kurt."

"Who is Uncle Kurt, Xaver?"

Before the child could answer, Miss Simpkins broke in:

"Xaver calls all soldiers officers. Herr Kurt is a common soldier who lives opposite us."

"That's not true! shouted the child. "Uncle Kurt is a lieutenant in the Wandsbeck Hussars; Aunt Harriet told me so!"

Puppy stood on her hind legs by Xaver and pushed her head under the child's arm. It seemed to Hartl as though the bitch were trying to distract the boy's attention.

As he went on his way to the circus he couldn't stop thinking about this mysterious Uncle Kurt. A terrible jealousy took hold of him. Who was lying, Miss Simkins or the child? Could this Uncle Kurt be responsible for the great change in Rosl? He shook himself, and was ashamed of this new dreadful feeling of jealousy. He walked along with bowed head, called a rickshaw, got into the light two-wheeled vehicle and was driven through the lively streets of the Indian town without ever looking at its life and movement.

After her husband had left her, Rosl had thrown herself into a chair. She buried her face in her hands and began to sob. She was ashamed and angry at her behaviour. Why had she lost control of herself like that? She felt that a breach had come into her marriage and determined to avoid any quarrelling in the future. She made up her mind to visit the circus that night and ask Hartl's pardon.

Miss Simkins interrupted her meditations.

"Mrs. Gürtler, I've just met Mr. Gürtler." She pushed Xaver into the next room and shut the door.

Rosl had dried her tears, and was looking expectantly at the governess.

"Well?"

"Mrs. Gürtler, it would be better if Xaver did not talk so much about Mr. Döring in front of Mr. Gürtler. He's always mentioning his name, and when Mr. Gürtler asked me about him I had to tell him that he was just a common soldier."

Rosl grew very red.

"Why did you do that ? Why did you lie to Mr. Gürtler ?"

"Well, I thought——"

"There's no need for you to think, and in future please don't bother yourself about things that are no concern of yours."

"All right, madam."

Miss Simkins went quietly out of the room.

Again Rosl was angry with herself for having lost her temper. After thinking it over, she summoned Miss Simkins and apologized for her hasty words.

"You must forgive my having been rather sharp, Miss Simkins—this terrible climate, this ghastly heat makes me so irritable."

"All right, madam."

In the evening Rosl took Xaver to the circus, and they visited Hartl, who was with his animals who were pacing nervously up and down in their cages as they always did before a performance.

Rosl whispered: "Hartl, my dearest, be kind to me! The heat is upsetting me, and I hardly know what I am saying. Please forgive me, Hartl." And without bothering about any onlookers, she pulled down his head and kissed him on the mouth.

The young man felt very happy, he was quickly propitiated and forgot all that had worried him during the day. That evening his performance went so well that the Governor, who was present, asked the manager to be introduced to the tamer. Rosl, too, was presented to them and captivated them by her perfect English and her Viennese charm. The ladies paid Hartl many compliments, and did not conceal their admiration at the way he handled animals reputed in India to be so ferocious.

A rich Indian prince asked Hartl and Rosl to visit him in his romantic palace at Bhor-Ghat. He wished to present the courageous tamer with four beautiful leopards.

Although husband and wife had now made up their differences, Hartl still felt ill-at-ease. Often it seemed as though Rosl were professing a love she no longer really felt. The manner in which she accepted his embraces seemed to him different from what it had been in former days. Nevertheless, she succeeded in putting off his suspicions. She travelled with the circus for half a year, and left for Europe when they reached Madras. They parted

from each other tenderly, and Rosl promised, with tears in her eyes, that she would write to him daily, making Hartl swear in his turn that he would never miss a day as he occasionally had before.

Rosl would have liked to have stayed by his side, but the child was seedy again, and the doctor urged that he should leave the tropics.

These were sad days for Hartl. He would have liked to have broken his contract with Richards, but the circus manager was not disposed to lose his *pièce-de-resistance.* Hartl had to face up to fourteen more months before his contract expired.

It was as though a worm were gnawing at his heart. His love for Rosl was greater than ever, life without her seemed impossible.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE Horner Derby had brought together thousands of spectators from Hamburg, Altona, and the whole empire. The stands, the course, the totalisator, and the paddock were black with people.

The sun blazed fiercely, and waiters ran about with great trays loaded with long rows of tankards filled with the golden, foaming Bahrenfeld beer.

In one of the first-tier boxes sat a pretty woman in a diaphonous summer frock. She was accompanied by Lieutenant Kurt Döring, of the Wandsbeck Hussars. When a Press photographer directed his camera at the box, she covered her face with a white parasol, which was edged with real lace.

A brutal smile wreathed the officer's mouth ; he thrust back Frau Rosl Gürtler's parasol and gave the photographer the signal to click.

"It's very stupid of you, Kurt ! Suppose this photograph gets published in some paper and my husband sees it——"

"Still frightened of your cave-man ? How great this love must be."

The officer's mocking laugh made his big nose spread. He was a repulsive sight, more like an ugly faun than anything else, and this impression was accentuated by his large cold eyes and lack of eyebrows.

With an angry look at Döring, Rosl turned away.

It was a year and a half since Rosl, who had once thought that there was only one man in the world for her—and that man Hartl Gürtler—had fallen under the officer's spell.

Rosl's villa was bounded on one side by the property of the Ungewitter's, a very rich Altona family. The eldest son, Fedor, was carrying on an affair with the singer, Harriet Buntrock. The establishments in which Harriet displayed what she called her art were usually low music-halls. Her *pièce-de-resistance* at that time was the German-French ditty:

"Je suis toujours
Comme il faut,
Hoch und Schneidig,
Schon asooo.
Ich heb das klad
Und zeig den fuss,
Je veux envoyer
Euch einen Gruss."

The *jeunesse dorée* of Altona delighted to haunt *Cafés chantants* where it was easy to form temporary attachments. During the whole performance the "artistes" sat on the stage, and were treated to German porter. The ladies kept their bottles and glasses under their chairs and, as the evening progressed, so did their number. There was a certain number of gentlemen who actually ordered liqueurs, but it was generally known that only thieving domestics and cashiers could permit themselves such expensive luxuries.

Fedor Ungewitter had chosen Miss Harriet Buntrock from Kadinen for his mistress. He gave her six bottles of porter and her supper every evening, and from twenty to fifty marks every week. In return for these gifts the lady was under contract to remain faithful to her partner. For business and professional reasons, she was permitted to accept presents of porter from other, more or less secret, admirers; but Fedor absolutely forbade her to smile at the givers. On such occasions Miss Harriet from Kadinen, with the most solemn of faces, would raise her glass, hold it in front of her nose, wipe away the thick foam with her middle finger, and empty the vessel in one gulp. Any remains of the froth were removed from her lips with the back of her hand.

When, in summer, the elders of the Ungewitter family spent their time between the watering-places of Nenmühlen and Scheveningen, Fedor invited his beloved Harriet, with some of her friends, and cronies of his own, to stay with him at his father's house and hold high revelry.

It was on one such occasion that Hariet made Rosl's acquaintance. A rather excitable young man had flung Harriet's wide-brimmed straw hat diagonally in the air. If he imagined that it was a boomerang, he was sorely deceived. The hat vanished over the wall into Rosl's garden.

Climbing a fruit tree by the hedge, Harriet had noticed in the next garden a young woman who was holding her hat in her hand. The singer ran round by the road into Rosl's garden. The friendship had dated from that day.

Hartl's wife had been very happy in her home. The lovely garden, a boat on the Elbe, a toy waggonette with a pony, a theatre subscription, the well-stocked library, and Xaver were a sure safeguard against boredom. She had often heard the rowdy laughter in the next garden and been extremely annoyed at the disturbance of her peace.

Miss Harriet took a great liking to the young Viennese —real Viennese—and invited her to come over to see the large park.

Curiosity incited Rosl to accept the invitation, but she hated the noisy vulgarity of what she saw, and after the first visit she declined all other invitations.

But the lovely Harriet was not to be shaken off so easily ; she called even more frequently and also brought her friend, who, strange to say, behaved with great circumspection in Rosl's presence.

On an excursion to Blankenese Rosl was introduced to Kurt Döring, Lieutenant of Hussars.

Döring was tall and slim, but had an ugly face. A mocking smile was always playing round his big mouth, and everyone found his watery blue, staring eyes most repulsive. With women, however, he had great success, in which his uniform played no small part.

Rosl took an instinctive dislike to Döring at their first meeting, and made no attempt to conceal her feelings, but he did not let that worry him. He meant to possess

the pretty Viennese; she was in a very different class to these music-hall women, being a harmonious combination of race, charm, and grace.

His perseverance was to be rewarded. Rosl's vanity was tickled by the jealousy of other women. The officer would not be turned away, but became a constant visitor in Rosl's house, invited her to picnics, races, the battle of flowers on the Alster, and other amusements, accompanied her to theatres, and on her walks, made friends with Xaver, and neglected no opportunity of showing her the most delicate attentions. He never spoke of his admiration in so many words, but always kept within the bounds of chivalry. He had almost severed his connection with the villa next door, and alienated Harriet by his caustic wit.

There came a time when he had to go to Lockstädt Camp for a few weeks' manœuvres, and could only come to Hamburg on Sundays. Rosl began to miss him. She had grown used to having him about without cherishing any warmer feeling for him. One day she went to Lockstädt to see a great military display. Döring had told her what a magnificent spectacle it would be. This journey was to be her undoing.

On the evening before the manœuvres, Döring took Rosl to a small restaurant for dinner. The day was hot and sultry, and thunder was in the air. Rosl wanted champagne, as the trying heat had made her extremely thirsty. She hastily swallowed glass after glass.

Döring gave her all she wanted, and when he observed the effect of the wine he began subtly to make love to her. She mocked at him, and ordered him to stop, but he did not let that deter him, whispered passionate words into her ear, filled her glass and drank her health. The wine, the secluded alcove, and his burning words produced their effect.

Hartl had been away from Altona for many long months, and Döring, with his flattering ways, and the hot blood coursing in his veins, made Rosl forget husband, child, and marriage vows.

Thereafter Rosl could not shake herself free of Döring, notwithstanding her intense regret at what she had done and her frequent resolutions not to see him again. He came

and took by force what she refused him. She was no longer her own mistress. She was his slave, and yet she tortured herself with remorse until a mood of slight indifference settled upon her. Her letters to Hartl became less frequent; weeks often passed before she could screw herself up to writing, and—a thing she could never have believed—she fell in love with Döring and abandoned all restraint in her relations with him. The visit to India interrupted the affair, and Rosl hoped she would get over her love for Döring if she did not see him for a comparatively long time. In this she deceived herself; she was in doubt about the true nature of her feelings, and made not the slightest effort to keep her agitation within bounds in Hartl's presence. She began to hate both Hartl and Döring, yet she clung to both, and neither would, nor could, release either.

Miss Simkins, the butler and his wife, the neighbours, Hamburg society, and the music-hall clientéle—the latter kept *au courant* by Harriet Buntrock—knew the whole story, and the spiciest tales went the rounds about Rosl Gürtler and Lieutenant Döring.

One day Miss Simkins walked up to Rosl, looked her straight in the face, and flung at her:

"If it were not for little Xaver, and Mr. Gürtler himself, I would leave you here and now. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Rosl was inclined to blaze up at first, but second thoughts proved best, and she said nothing. She even stooped so low as to try and buy Miss Simkins's silence with presents. When the English woman refused to take them, she had hysterics, but in spite of Miss Simkins's warnings she would not break with Döring; she had become a slave and a prisoner.

On her return from India, Rosl had made a firm resolution to have no more to do with him. The idea took an ever stronger hold upon her, but it only lasted as far as Cuxhaven, and from there she sent a telegram to Döring, reporting her arrival.

The "lovers" abandoned restraint of any kind, and Döring, who had previously called only by day, or in the evening, now frequently spent whole nights in the little villa in Ottensen.

Rosl was lost to everything but him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

"IT'S no good, Auntie Loisi; something inside me tells me that Rosl isn't faithful to Hartl. His mother showed me her letter, and it confirmed my suspicions."

"That's simply stupid, Mitzi. It's high time you grew up and became sensible. Your love for Hartl has become a sin."

"That's unjust, Auntie Loisi; I can't deny that I am in love with Hartl. 'In love' is not the word for it; but let me tell you something that's often happened to me. The first time I was walking in the vineyards, and suddenly saw Hartl coming towards me. His face was dead-white, and he put his finger to his lips as a signal to me not to break the silence. As he stood before me, he ripped off his coat, and I saw his heart underneath. Two little hands were clutching it, and a long needle had gone right through it, and drops of blood ran down the needle. I saw it as clear as I am standing here."

Frau Höllriegel gazed at Mitzi in horror. Her face was deathly pale.

"Mitzi, my child! Are you mad? You ought to see a doctor; there is something the matter with you!"

"I am quite all right; there's nothing the matter with me. My vision came from God and the Holy Mother. There's something else, Auntie Loisi. When I was going to Kritzendorff on Sunday I plainly saw a struggle going on in the Danube. Rosl was holding Hartl down under the water, and when he tried to shout a man's hand was laid on his mouth."

"Pray God you're wrong, Mitzi, but I think myself that there's something wrong with Rosl; her letters to Hartl are quite different now."

"She hasn't written to Vienna for the last two months." Mitzi sat lost in thought. Suddenly an idea came to her.

"You must promise me one thing, Aunt Loisi; if anything goes wrong in Hamburg you must go with me to Hartl and help him."

"Talk of the devil and he'll surely appear! I hope you'll never need my help."

Rosl's long silence worried old Frau Gürtler. Meanwhile, Hartl had written to her several times; she read

between the lines, and great was her anxiety about her far-away son.

Frau Gürtler was sinking from day to day; she knew that her time had come, but was determined not to alarm her children.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

A NUMBER of people crowded round the counter of the Orient Line's booking-office in Sydney. "Information" was written above.

Richardl Gürtler, drumming nervously with his fingers, was waiting for a lady who was bombarding the clerks with an unending fire of questions.

"When is the next boat to Europe?"

The clerk repeated Hartl's question.

"Wait a minute."

Hartl's face was a rich, deep brown, the work of a tropical sun. He had grown very thin, and looked careworn.

"In four days; the *Cabiria* leaves Melbourne at 10 o'clock for Queenstown."

"How long does it take?"

"Twenty-six days."

"All right. One first-class and two second-class cabins, and three dog tickets. I suppose I pay for my baggage when it's shipped? I've thirty cages of wild animals and a mass of other stuff."

Director Richards had allowed Hartl to break his contract on condition of his entering into an engagement for a further tour in two years. Hartl signed the agreement. It seemed to be his fate to be perpetually making the round of half the globe, a round which had brought him nothing but trouble and sorrow.

Two days later Hartl went on board at Melbourne. He had a dead-calm passage through the Australian Bight and the Indian Ocean.

From morning to night he sat, a morose figure in his deck-chair, or strode rapidly round the promenade-deck. He had his meals brought to him in his cabin by the deck steward, but ate practically nothing; Puppy profited most. He seldom went down to see his animals fed, although he had hitherto never allowed anyone else to perform this duty,

He sat for hours, staring into space, and stroking Puppy, lying at his side. Frequently he drew out a letter, to which a cutting from an illustrated paper was attached. It was the picture of Rosl and Lieutenant Döring in their box at Horn race-course.

Under the photograph were the words: "The well-known gentleman rider, Lieutenant Kurt Döring, of the Wandsbeck Hussars."

Rosl could easily be recognized; there could be no mistake about her great eyes and lovely small face. Only the affected smile was new to Hartl.

Hartl read the letter again, probably for the thousandth time. He knew it by heart.

To Mr. Richardl Gürtler,
Richards' Circus,
now in Sydney,
Australia.
(*over.*)

HERR GÜRTLER,

I have special reasons for writing to you anonymously. I do not know you personally, only by repute. Your calling compels you to travel all over the world, and it is difficult for you to keep your house under proper observation. Your wife has been unfaithful to you—quite openly—with an officer. If you come back unexpectedly you will get the surprise of your life.

Forgive me for writing, but my conscience compels me to do so.

The letter was not signed.

When Hartl received it a few weeks before, his first impulse was to throw it away in contempt. Why pay any attention to the kind of coward who pours out poison and gall without giving his name as a guarantee!

Some letters from Rosl had arrived with the anonymous one. They were all extremely affectionate. Hartl felt thoroughly ashamed of having doubted his beloved, even for a moment. Perhaps Rosl, with her Viennese impulsiveness, had been a little too friendly, and thus created a false impression.

His Rosl was not wicked, no, indeed. He told himself so a hundred times.

A fortnight later the newspaper cutting had arrived, without a word of explanation.

A few days afterwards came letters from his mother and Mitzi. The latter's unskilled wording made him fear the worst, particularly the sentence:

"And don't forget that I am always with you in thought, and if anything ever happens, please, please, let me know."

So they knew all about it in Vienna, and were keeping him in the dark. The photograph of Rosl with the lieutenant was the most striking proof. He had immediately drafted a telegram, telling Rosl to go to Vienna at once. Xaver must be handed over to his grandmother's keeping. Then second thoughts proved best. He would take her by surprise, and if the statements in the letters proved correct, he would drive her from his doors like the wanton she was.

Miss Simkins! He hadn't given her a thought when conjecturing who the anonymous correspondent might be. The Englishwoman must have written the letter! He recalled the meeting in Bombay; she had been on the verge of telling him something then, and had looked at him very peculiarly.

To Hartl, the minutes were hours, and days were weeks. Sometimes Nature claimed her rights and he slept for hours in his deck-chair in the daytime. When this happened, Puppy sat by him, and guarded her master. Anyone who came too near would have been severely bitten. When Hartl awoke, she stretched herself and licked his hand, and it was her turn to sleep. The faithful creature was old now, and needed much more sleep than in earlier days.

The days on which Hartl then fell asleep from sheer weariness were followed by sleepless nights, full of torment.

In the Red Sea a fierce and torrid hurricane made the ship toss like a cork. Both human and animal passengers felt it. Hartl spent many a long hour with his beasts, the great cats suffered terribly from sea-sickness, and a panther died after days of torment.

The nearer the ship approached to Europe, the greater was Hartl's agitation. He almost wished that the ship would go down with every soul on board. This idea came to him frequently during the storm in the Red Sea.

At last the coasts of Europe came in sight, and the ship headed for Marseilles. It was another twenty-four hours' steaming to the French port. Queenstown would be reached in five or six days. Hartl could not wait so long. After a few moments' reflection he went to see the purser.

"Is it possible for me to get a special train from Marseilles to Hamburg?" he asked.

"I don't know about Hamburg, but it will be all right to the German frontier."

"Please put this through for me, the moment we arrive in Marseilles."

"Certainly, sir. How many persons, and will you be taking your animals and all your other gear with you?"

"Yes, I am taking the lot. Can you also order meat and ice for the journey?"

"Anything you want, sir. We shall stay at least six to eight hours in the port. How much meat must I order?"

"Do the whole thing for me, please. I can't tell you the quantity of meat until I know how long the journey to Hamburg takes."

"It'll cost you a lot of money, Mr. Gürtler."

"I'll leave it all to you, Mr. Purser."

Within three hours of the arrival of the ship in Marseilles, the express, consisting of one coach and two goods vans and a guard's van, left on its journey to Strasburg via Lyons.

Puppy never left Hartl's side. Had the little creature any suspicion of its master's sorrow? When the train stopped at a station, it ran about while its master paced the platform.

The train reached the Hanover Station in Hamburg at 10 o'clock in the evening.

Hartl instructed his servants to hand over the animals first thing next morning to Hagenbeck's on the Alter Pferdemarkt in Altona.

He took a cab to drive to Altona. On St. Paul's everything was in full swim. People were sitting outside the Café Hammonia, listening to the band playing in Hornhardt's Gardens. The Panoptikum, the Wilhelmshallen, Eden Theatre, Köllisch, Naucke, and the big beer saloons were full of sailors, prostitutes, and pleasure-seekers. The audience was pouring out of the Ernst Drücker Theatre. A flaming poster announced that the great draw, our *Tedje*

mit Utzicht, was being given, and that the comedy, *Zigarren Hannes und Zitronenjette*, would be repeated on Sunday.

At the Nobistor some sailors were fighting with stokers. Knives flashed, and prostitutes screamed.

The cab drove along the silent streets of Altona, up the Königstrasse, past Klopstock's Monument, and into the Elbchaussée.

Hartl turned up the collar of his coat. He was cold. Puppy nestled against him.

As the cab passed the long wall of the Ungewitters' Park, Hartl saw that a light was still burning in his house. He told the coachman to stop, and asked him to wait, but why he did so he could not say.

The cabby began to growl. He was afraid of being done out of his fare. Hartl left his handbag in the cab and gave the man a twenty-mark piece.

"Wait until I come back, or send someone out to you."

"All right, sir, I'll wait for you."

Puppy wanted to go with Hartl.

"Stay there, Puppy, till I come back."

He stroked the animal's head and hastened away. Puppy jumped up on the seat and her large eyes followed Hartl anxiously as he strode towards the house.

Lights were still burning on the first floor. Two windows: the bedroom.

Hartl cautiously climbed the fence. He stood for a while in the garden, looking up at the windows. Was that someone speaking? And was not that the ring of a man's laugh?"

He began to tremble, and his teeth chattered furiously. He could not believe, or realize that Rosl, his dear Rosl, had betrayed him. Once again came the sound of a man talking, and now he could also hear a woman giggling.

It was she. It was Rosl!

Stepping softly he went to the door. He pressed down the latch, but the door was locked. He crept along the wall. At the back, a window over the kitchen was open. He took a flying jump at the ledge, and swung himself up and through the window. A flower-pot fell with a crash to the ground. Hartl cowered in an alcove on the stairs. He listened intently to see if anyone had been aroused by the noise.

Nothing stirred. Silence reigned throughout the house.

In the distance could be heard the shriek of a steamer's whistle on the Elbe. The leaves rustled softly in the night-breeze.

Hartl went to the window and looked out. A shooting star left a fiery train in the sky. Superstitious as he was, Hartl regarded this as a good omen. His Rosl, whom he so dearly loved, was true. And yet! What about the man's voice he had heard? And Rosl's laugh. His ear had not deceived him.

He crept softly down the stairs. At the dining-room door he stopped and listened. Not a sound. If he had turned round, he could not have failed to notice that in the doorway of Xaver's bedroom, Miss Simkins was standing, white as a sheet, in a long nightdress, and staring at him with terror in her eyes. She had recognized Hartl in the light of the little lamp in the corridor, but she could not utter a sound, because fear paralysed her tongue. She knew that the catastrophe was now inevitable, and half-fainting, staggered back into her bedroom.

Hartl gently pressed against the door and stepped into the dark dining-room. A pale, shimmering light fell from the window on to the table. The plates and glasses were still there. Places for two! Making no sound, he crept to the centre of the room; the door to the drawing-room was open, and likewise that leading from the drawing-room into the bedroom. The drawing-room was also in darkness, but lights were still burning at the far end of the bedroom. A strange man was sitting half-upright in bed, smoking a cigarette and wearing one of Hartl's night-shirts. Rosl lay beside him, her arms behind her head. She was coaxing him:

"Let's go to sleep, Kurt. I'm tired."

A few strides carried Hartl to the bedroom door. He drew his revolver from his pocket and held it cocked. Rosl screamed. She had recognized her husband. In a panic she drew the sheet over her face.

Döring leaped out of bed.

"Hands up, you dog! Hands up! Sharp, or I'll let fly!"

The officer was rather slow in obeying the order; he was inclined to rush at Hartl, but realized the hopelessness of such a proceeding. Hartl, with his free hand, snatched at the lieutenant's uniform which was lying on a chair,

and flung it through the open window. The sword clattered to the floor.

"Get out! Get out of that window!"

Döring leaped at Hartl, who stepped back, dropped the revolver, knocked him down with one blow, and then caught him up again. He seemed to have a giant's strength. Döring defended himself desperately, but Hartl's blows, the blows of a boxer, utterly bewildered him. The deceived husband drove him back to the window and then, with a mighty blow in the face, knocked him head over heels into the garden. The body fell to the ground with a thud.

Raging like a madman, Hartl returned to the bedroom. He stumbled over the sword and, without stopping to think, bent down, drew the weapon from its sheath, and rushed into the adjoining room.

The adulteress cowered under the bedclothes, half out of her wits; she did not dare to put her head out. Hartl rushed at the bed, flung off the sheets, and struck at Rosl, who screamed aloud, and thrust out her hands to defend herself.

"Hartl, Hartl, for God's sake don't! Oh! Oh! Hartl, Hartl! You're killing me."

The blood spurted and poured from the wounds on Rosl's hands and face.

He would have killed her if Xaver had not run in between them. The child had been awakened by the screams, and had jumped out of bed, and rushed into the room. Miss Simkins came tottering behind him.

The maniac came to himself at last, he was deathly pale, and stared down at the child. He immediately recovered his senses. Miss Simkins rushed up to the bed, and tried to stop the bleeding. Rosl was whimpering softly.

Hartl lifted Xaver up, kissed him, and took him out of the room. The gardener's wife was standing outside. She retreated horror-struck.

"Here, Frau Gabler, take the child; I'm going to fetch a doctor."

He went back to the bedroom.

"Oh, Mr. Gürtler, what have you done?"

"I'm going for a doctor, Miss Simkins, then I'll give myself up to the police. Please come and see me in the morning, and give me the news."

He bent down, caught hold of the blood-stained sword, and broke it across his knee, then left the room, without so much as a glance at the bed.

In the garden below Kurt Döring, his face bleeding and swollen, was leaning against the wall, holding part of his uniform in his arms. He stared like a madman at the husband who had avenged his honour, but the latter left the house, ignoring his very existence.

Puppy was still where she had been left. As Hartl came up, and the coachman awoke, she wagged her stumpy tail, and gave her master a curious, searching look.

"Königsplatz, the police station. I'll give you a good tip if you hurry."

"All right, sir, get in."

The pale young man's words cleared the sleep out of the eyes of the police-officer on duty. He rang up the police doctor, woke up his colleagues, sleeping in the next room, and sent for the inspector.

"You, Herr Gürtler?"

Inspector Scharp gazed at Hartl in mazement. He knew all about the Frau Gürtler-Döring affair. It had been no secret for a long time. Everyone looked at Hartl, and felt very sorry for him.

"Yes, Inspector, it's I."

"Whatever's happened?"

"I've attacked her."

Scharp took a deep breath, he was sorry for him.

"What can I do for you, Herr Gürtler?"

"My animals will want looking after. If at all possible, I don't want anything in the papers, at any rate no names. My old mother mustn't hear about it, either."

The policeman came in growling. He had been awakened out of his best sleep.

Scharp put on his cap, and buckled on his sword.

"Can I wait here in the charge room until you come back, Inspector?"

The officer reflected for a moment, and then nodded.

"All right, you can wait here for me, sir. Hansen, let Herr Gürtler have anything he wants."

"Yes, sir."

The carriage containing the inspector and the doctor rattled at a gallop up the street to Ottensen.

Richardl Gürtler sat on the bench in the charge-room. He had his dog on his lap, and sat stroking her coat, while his eyes burned, and the medley of thoughts in his head resolved themselves into one prayer:

His mother must never know anything!

Rosl's wounds turned out to be serious, but not dangerous.

"She'll have some respectable scars to show," said the doctor when the two men came back.

"You let yourself go, young man."

A few hours later Miss Simkins arrived at the police station. Hartl handed Puppy over to her. He kissed the little dog's forehead, and sighed deeply. His faithful companion for so many years, was what he would miss most. His wife was lost to him for ever, and his child had become a stranger.

"Stay and look after Xaver, if you possibly can, Miss Simkins. I'll make all the money arrangements to-day. My mother mustn't hear a word. I want you now to go to this house work and instruct Doctor Steinlechner to act for me in the case. Perhaps I shall be allowed to receive visits from time to time, so that I shall know what's happening."

The tears ran down the Englishwoman's cheeks. Hartl said good-bye to Puppy, and then turned away.

Puppy struggled to get out of Miss Simkins' arms. The sound of the little dog's piteous howls in the street could be heard in the charge-room.

CHAPTER FORTY

ROSL'S forehead, swathed in bandages, was, where visible, a ghostly white. Her head was wrapped in gauze. A thick bandage was wound round her right arm, from the elbow to the finger tips. Her mouth was likewise bandaged, and there was still a look of terror in her eyes.

She had lain in the Altona Hospital for weeks. She had not had much fever, and the efforts of the doctors had succeeded in staving off complications. She had to be artificially fed by means of a glass tube.

Police officials appeared every moment with the object of making a thorough investigation at the first favourable

opportunity. Hitherto Rosl's wounds had made it impossible for her to talk.

To-day the bandage was to be removed from her mouth. The young woman had dumbly acquiesced in everything without showing any sign of pain. She closed her eyes as they carried her into the operating theatre and only raised her lids when she felt the bandage being removed. The first thing she asked for—a mirror. It was not vanity that inspired the request. She merely wanted to see whether her punishment for her infidelity had been too great, and whether she was so disfigured that her appearance would give people a fright.

She had lain awake for days and nights. No childish longing for revenge obsessed her; she had been fully conscious of her great sin against Hartl during the whole of her association with Döring, but had fought in vain against it. Even now she could not imagine what it was that had kept her under the spell of such a brute. She had not the slightest notion what sexual slavery meant.

During the weeks she had been lying in hospital her thoughts had been continuously occupied with her wrongdoing. She hated Hartl with a bitter hatred. Why had he used her so badly? Was her crime so dreadful? Was not his guilt just as great, if not greater? Why had he not taken her with him on his travels? Was it usual to leave a young and emotional woman so long alone? She had always had to accompany him in the old days. If he had only given her an ordinary beating, the sort of beating her father used to give her mother, she would certainly have never been unfaithful again. But he had raged like a madman, and Xaver's arrival alone had saved her from death.

A feeling of contempt crept over her when she thought of Döring. Why had he not flung himself at Hartl, and snatched the revolver from him, instead of helplessly letting himself be thrown out of the window with his fists in the air?

The women of the Seven Houses was faithful enough, of course, but marital loyalty was not the result of moral considerations; the women there had few opportunities of associating with other men, and hard work and hard times kept frivolous thoughts at bay.

Hartl was quite right to be furious; but if he had only smacked her face a bit, or punished her in some other way!

It was quite beyond her comprehension how he could attack her like a maniac with a sharp sword, and do his utmost to hack her to pieces. Never, never would she live with him again ; she would always be seeing him as she saw him then, with his face deathly white, and striking at her with the blood-stained sword. She would rather go back to the factory and work than live with a savage.

Miss Harriet Buntrock often visited Rosl, poured out her sympathy, and assured her that everyone was extremely sorry for her. She told her that Döring had not yet recovered ; he would certainly have to give up his military career. The idea of an officer losing his sword and being thrown out of the window by a civilian !

There was nothing in the papers about the affair, all Hartl said was that he had injured his wife very seriously in a quarrel. The cause of the quarrel was never mentioned.

In the vicinity of the Abchaussee there was talk about a fight between the animal tamer and the officer in whose company the young wife had been seen so constantly, but no one knew anything certain. Little Ungewitter told Rosl that Döring had rung the bell of the garden gate and been found by the porter lying unconscious on the pavement. He had nothing on but a nightshirt, and he was convulsively clutching his trousers. The Hussar was now lying in the military hospital at Wansbeck, to which he had been taken, and refused to give any information.

Rosl would gladly have given away the whole story, but she had to keep silence. As far as she was concerned, Döring might just as well have been dead ; she had dismissed him from her thoughts, and could not understand what had kept her so long under the spell of the hideous creature.

For Xaver she had no consideration whatsoever. He often burst in on her, but she never felt any longing to see the child. She was adamant about one thing—when she recovered she would bring her boy up to hate his father, and show him every day the scars of the wounds Hartl had inflicted upon her, so that he should grow up in horror of his sire. *That* should be the savage's punishment.

She gradually came to think of herself as a martyr. She had sacrificed her youth for the Gürtler boy, waited years for him, starved and refused to go with other boys—and he had not written to her once ! He ought to have been

utterly grateful for the fact that she came to his arms pure and virginal. Oh, what a wicked, wicked man Hartl Gürtler was!

"Do you hear me, Frau Gürtler? Can you understand what I say?" asked the professor, after he had removed the bandage from Rosl's head, taken the stitches out of a blood-red scar running from her ear to her chin, and secured the gauze dressing of her wounds with strips of sticking-plaster. Rosl's eyes wandered from the doctor's face to those of the police-officers. She gave a slight nod.

"Can you talk? Have a try, but only open your mouth the tiniest bit."

Barely moving her lips, she whispered:

"Yes."

"Will you please tell me why your husband attacked you?"

Rosl reflected anxiously. If she only knew what she should say! Here was a favourable opportunity for revenging herself on Hartl. Could she not simply deny everything? Döring would certainly say nothing. She worked out in her little brain that what *she* said would alone carry conviction. But after a few moments' thought she changed her line of speculation. Why were these gentlemen questioning her? Hartl could certainly have given nothing away. No, she could not possibly admit that her husband had caught her in bed with another man. She opened her lips, but the movement hurt her. Softly and slowly came the words:

"I can't tell you anything."

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

"NINE months' imprisonment."

The president rose to announce the sentence.

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say against the sentence?"

Doctor Steinlechner, Hartl's counsel, turned round to his client. He wanted to intervene, and tell the court that he would appeal against the heavy sentence, but before he could get a word out, Hartl replied:

"I accept the sentence."

There was a general murmur of disapproval at its severity, an acquittal was certainly expected.

The disapproval extended to the judge-advocate and the Hussar officers. The former appeared as co-prosecutor. The broken sword had to be avenged. Penal servitude alone was the appropriate punishment for anyone insulting the arms of his Majesty's officers.

The prosecuting counsel, a young and smart lieutenant of the reserve, had demanded five years' imprisonment, but the jury had acquitted Hartl on the charge of attempted murder, and found him guilty only of inflicting grievous bodily harm.

Hartl had made things easy for the court. To the examining magistrate he had said:

"I have injured my wife by inflicting severe wounds with a sharp weapon."

He refused to give any reason for his action.

The court had been told by the butler and his wife of the relations between Gürtler's wife and Lieutenant Kurt Döring. A woman newsvendor in the employ of the *Altona Tageblatt*, who had to start her rounds early in the morning, deposed that a man in his nightshirt had collapsed on the pavement at the gate of the Ungewitter Park. The authorities intimated briefly that Lieutenant Döring had sent in his resignation; but no reasons were given.

The broken sword had been found on the scene of the crime, and recognized as the property of the Lieutenant.

In spite of all the efforts of the prosecuting counsel, Miss Simkins would say nothing damaging about the accused. She had seen nothing of any fight between the two men. Mr. Gürtler had been alone in the room. The court decided to dispense with the evidence of the child. Hartl's heart beat violently when he saw Rosl again in the course of the trial. His rage welled up within him. The woman whom he loved with every fibre of his being, evaded his glance, and when her eyes lighted on him on one occasion, they were cold and glassy. Cold, and full of hatred. He was quite unable to find any explanation of the fact that this creature had fought and suffered for him for years, and followed him to the ends of the earth, only to betray him brutally, and turn away from him now.

Upon the judge's intimation that Rosl could give evidence against her husband if she so desired, she had reflected a moment; and then declared that she did not wish to go into the box. Of course, she would only have been too delighted to let herself go against him, but in that case he might let the whole story out, and reveal the fact that he had caught the Lieutenant in bed with her. When she caught sight of Herr and Frau Höllriegel in Mitzi's company, in the corridor, she felt very uncomfortable. She was very angry with the girl for coming all the way from Vienna. How delighted she would be to see her rival so mutilated! Well, the way was open now; she could have him after fishing for him for so long. The recent scars on her face were still red, but she was not exactly disfigured, and with the passing of the years they would get smaller, though they would never entirely disappear. Whenever she looked in the glass these marks would remind her of her shame and misfortune.

Miss Buntrock, who had gone with Rosl to the trial, was furious with her friend for declining to give evidence.

The court slowly emptied. Hartl was the last to leave. He was in custody and his counsel accompanied him. Höllriegel, Frau Loisi, and Mitzi were in the corridor outside. They had received permission to speak to Hartl. Loisi was anything but anxious to meet Rosl, especially as the latter had left the court without even a glance at her husband. In the corridor she passed her Viennese acquaintances with averted face.

"Does mother know anything?" was Hartl's first question, when he joined his friends in the conference room.

"No, Hartl, your mother knows nothing. She thinks you're still in Australia."

"Hasn't there been anything in the papers?"

"There's only a note in the *Late Special*," replied Herr Hölbriegel, "but nobody will know whom it refers to."

"I'll appeal for your release at once, Herr Gürtler," said the lawyer, "you can start to work out your sentence later."

"Please don't trouble, Herr Doktor. I'll start at once."

The barrister shook his head; this was his first experience of such a client.

"We'll look after the boy Xaver," said Loisi.

"Where's the child now?" Hartl asked hoarsely.

"He's gone back to Rosl," said Loisi. "Do you mean to leave him with her?"

"Yes," replied Hartl, after a short pause. "Yes, the lad must stay with her."

"You've only to apply to the Guardians to have the child taken from her."

"No, Herr Doktor, she must keep the boy, and then perhaps she'll be the old Rosl once more."

All this time Mitzi had not taken her eyes off Hartl. She now walked up to him and took his hand.

"Hartl, when you come out in nine months' time, we'll be waiting for you. The time will fly, and you'll get back your old happiness."

He looked into Mitzi's wet eyes. This was the child who loved him. She was no longer a child. She had blossomed out into a mature maiden of twenty-two. He called to mind her mother, Feli Stiegler, whom he had known when he was a small boy. Mitzi was very like her, but she was bigger, and her features were more delicate.

"Thank you ever so much, Mitzi, but there will be little happiness for me any more." He turned to his lawyer.

"Are the animals all right, Herr Doktor? Has the Antwerp Zoo taken them all?"

"Yes, Herr Gürtler."

"Please look after the money for me. Pay my wife three hundred marks a month. Let the house as it stands, and please hand my personal property over to Frau Christine Hagenbeck for safe-keeping." He glanced round. "I asked if I could see Puppy again—would Miss Simkins bring her?"

"The lady with the dog is waiting outside in the corridor," said the attendant. "Shall I call her in."

"Please."

Puppy went mad with joy. Hartl sat on a form, holding the little creature in his arms, and whispering caresses into her ear.

"Puppy, my dear little dog, my kindest and best friend."

He pressed his face to the animal's head, and a low moan came from his lips.

Loisi chewed her handkerchief to prevent herself from crying out loud, while Mitzi's fingers closed convulsively on Xaver Höllriegel's arm, as she turned away.

"Miss Simkins, please stay here in Hamburg, and keep Puppy with you until I have finished my time. The Herr

Doktor may be able to arrange for me to be allowed to see her from time to time."

"I hope I can manage that."

"I want Puppy always to sleep on some garment of mine, and please be very kind to her."

"Mayn't we take the dog back to Vienna?" said Loisi.

"No, Frau Höllriegel, if you did I couldn't see the little chap, and I think it would die."

Hartl shook Mitzi's hand.

"God bless you, Mitzi! I am awfully grateful for all your sympathy, and for your coming here."

"We'll come again when you come out. Perhaps we shall be allowed to visit you?"

"No! I'm afraid not. I don't want to see anybody, and nobody must see me except Puppy—if that's allowed. My dog is the faithfulest friend I have in the world."

He pressed the animal to his breast, and then handed it to Miss Simkins, and without a further word passed through the door with the warder.

Puppy howled aloud, and the Englishwoman had great difficulty in preventing her from jumping out of her arms.

The door closed with a dull thud behind Hartl, as he entered the cells.

At that very moment Frau Gürtler said to Rosa, who was sitting by the bed:

"There's a door closing. Go and have a look, Rosa. I believe Hartl's come back."

Her daughter looked anxiously at her. Her mother's behaviour seemed to her rather odd. She went out looking fearfully behind her. When she came back her mother was lying, breathing heavily, and with her mouth twisted into a pained smile.

"Rosa, Rosa, is it Hartl?"

The white head fell on one side, the mouth agape, and the eyes closed.

"Mother! Mother!" Rosa screamed, and then collapsed on the bed.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

FOR nine months Hartl held no conversation with any human being. He merely answered the questions put to him by the prison officials. He never said a word

to his fellow-prisoners. He had asked to be allowed to serve out his sentence in a separate cell.

Miss Simkins visited Flensberg gaol every month, taking Puppy with her. The lawyer had secured permission for the prisoner to see the dog.

On these occasions Hartl sat on the bench in the visiting room for a full hour, with Puppy in his lap. The little animal lay quietly in her master's arms, thrusting her head into the angle of his elbow, and gazing sadly at him.

When the hour was up, Hartl gave the dog back to Miss Simkins, but from start to finish never exchanged a word with her.

The prison chaplain regarded Hartl as a hardened sinner. He lectured him severely because he did not reveal his feelings, confess, or go to Holy Communion.

The prison doctor took considerable interest in the prisoner, but could not rouse him from his apathy.

The days seemed to be endless and his work in the cell destructive to mind and nerves alike.

In theatrical circles the crime of the world-famous trainer was no secret. Hermann, the keeper, had not been able to keep his mouth shut, and *Der Artist* in Dusseldorf and the *Internationale Artisten-Zeitung* in Berlin, had long articles on the case. When Hartl heard of this, circuses, music-halls and menageries were things of the past for him. Nevermore would he appear on the stage or take any interest in animals. His dream of possessing his own menagerie some day would never be realized.

It was a terrible blow for Hartl when he heard of his mother's death. The day and hour coincided almost exactly with those of his sentence. Notwithstanding all the assurances of his sisters and brother that his mother knew nothing of his deed, he was not to be convinced that he was not responsible for her death.

In his cell he was always at work, and in fact, he doubled the minimum assigned him by prison regulations.

His work was making bottle covers of straw.

When the warder opened the door, great heaps of these covers were ready for him in the corner by the stove, which was heated from the corridor outside, and the cell was cleaned down and the bed made and secured to the wall.

Hartl had asked to be let off the morning "exercise" with the other prisoners, on the ground that he preferred

to remain in his cell. For disciplinary reasons this request was refused. It was nothing less than daily torture to him to have to spend an hour walking round in circles at two paces' distance from the man in front. Hands behind his back—in accordance with the regulations—and with his eyes fixed on the ground, he counted his steps. Each step meant one second, and he was always delighted when he had reached the big quota of sixty minutes which enabled him to return to his cell.

During the morning wash in the corridor the other convicts were always trying to talk to him, but he answered them curtly or not at all. The *Kalfaktor** hated him because he never managed to make him speak.

Church attendance on Sunday was just as great a torture as "exercise". A tinkling harmonium was played by one of the older convicts, the burgomaster of a little Holstein town, who had received a sentence of five years for misappropriation of trust funds, forgery and perjury. The governor of the gaol, a huge, fat, uncouth East Prussian was very religious.

The prisoners were for no reason whatever, subjected to all kinds of petty restrictions and annoyances. There were plenty of books in the prison library, but most of them were of a religious character. Scientific works were also available, but the governor and the chaplain did not allow the convicts to use them.

The governor would have been only too glad to withdraw Hartl's privilege of seeing his dog once a month, but the lawyer had obtained this concession from the state Attorney-General in Altona, and of this dignitary the tyrant of Flensburg gaol stood in mortal fear—though otherwise he misused his powers in every possible way.

When Easter approached, Hartl refused to go to Confession and Holy Communion, though the chaplain tried to make him.

"I won't be robbed of my freedom of conscience, sir. You can't compel me to go to Confession. It's quite enough to have to listen to sermons which are nothing but threats of hell, punishment and damnation and never contain a kind or gentle word."

* A convict employed to take charge of the arrangements for washing the corridors and also to bring and distribute meals; he is allowed to move freely about the building.

An hour after this conversation, Hartl was taken before the Governor.

"What do you mean by this, buffoon? You've insulted our Holy Catholic Church, and derided the sermons of our revered chaplain! You can take eight days' close confinement in chains and afterwards I'll see that you go to Confession."

At six o'clock the next morning Hartl was removed to the dark cell. He was allowed to take only one thin blanket with him. The *Kalfaktor* slipped a packet of cigarettes and some matches into his hand.

"I'll sneak some hot food in when I bring your bucket to-morrow. When I cough, put out your cigarette. When you're released, you can do me a good turn by smuggling out a letter, for my girl."

Hartl spent his nights sleepless and shivering with cold; he made up his mind to tell the Governor exactly what he thought about him, when his time for release came.

On the fourth day, the shutter was removed from the low window and he was allowed a bed and hot food.

After his period of close confinement was over, he was again taken before the Governor.

"You go to Confession at 6 a.m. on Saturday and to Communion at 8 on Sunday. March him off!"

On Saturday, Hartl knelt at the barred opening of the Confessional. He gave no answer to any of the chaplain's questions and was marched off without having opened his mouth. He feared he would be sent back to close confinement but, strange to say, nothing happened.

While in the dark cell the words of his aunts and uncles had come back to him:

"The lad'll come to a bad end some day on the gallows or in prison."

Would his relatives turn out to be right? Had he the makings of a criminal in him? He doubted it. What he had done had been in the heat of the moment. No, he was no criminal, and would never be a criminal.

He heard regularly from Mitzi every month. Enclosed with her letters were others, from his sisters and brothers and Herr and Frau Höllriegel. A month before his period was over he wrote to Frau Höllriegel to ask her to see that no one came to fetch him from prison. He preferred to be alone and have time to think things out. His money affairs

had been arranged by a lawyer. His house in the Elbchaussee as well as the animals with their cages and gear, had been sold; the money had been put on deposit and he would be grateful if Herr Höllriegel would later on act as Xaverl's guardian and trustee. He himself intended to try and start a new life.

On the day of his release Hartl, nervously twisting his hat in his fingers, stood in the Governor's office listening to the latter's regulation exhortations.

"I hope you'll be a decent man, so that Fate may never bring you back within these walls."

The humane gentleman, whose conscience permitted him to appropriate the enormous profit he made by cutting down the prisoner's extra rations, put out his hand over the barrier.

Hartl stared contemptuously at the proffered hand, and took his money lying on the pay table.

The Governor's face turned purple with rage. It had never happened before that a convict on leaving had had the impertinence to refuse to shake hands with this mighty official.

"Look here, Gürtler, a man will go with you to the station; we'll make certain that you clear out of Flensburg."

"Such a precaution is only allowed when there is danger that a released prisoner will stay in the town. I am leaving by the next train and don't want anyone in uniform to accompany me."

With flaming face and the veins projecting from his forehead, the Governor bawled:

"I'll have you taken back to the cells if you answer me back again. Schlüter, take this man to the station!"

"I lodge my protest and give you full warning that I'll knock any warder down who comes near me in the street."

"Take the swine away! And if you come back here again, God help you!"

Miss Simkins was sitting in the waiting-room with Puppy. The dog jumped up at its master, seeing him in ordinary clothes and knowing that it would never leave his side again.

At the foot of the hill on which the prison was built, Hartl stopped for a moment to gaze at the red brick building with its rows of barred windows. He heaved a deep sigh. He had spent nine months of his life there.

These nine months had made him years older. Never, never would he forget the time passed behind prison walls. But never, never would he cross the threshold of a gaol again.

The warder, Schlüter, came up to him.

"Don't be afraid that I'm coming into the town with you. All of us inside think a lot of you for never giving any trouble, and we were all very sorry that you got the dark cell all over the chaplain business. Good-bye; the old man needn't flatter himself that you'll ever come back. We know all about your story. So here's your railway fare to Altona, Herr Gürtler."

"Keep the money, Herr Schlüter, and buy those poor devils some butter or tobacco. Good-bye."

Xaver Höllriegel was waiting at the corner of the Bahnhoffstrasse.

"Hello, Hartl! Welcome back among us."

"Hello, Herr Höllriegel! Why have you taken the trouble to come all this way?"

"Any of us would do anything for our old pal Hartl Gürtler."

Clenching his teeth, Hartl strode along by the old man's side. He had not wanted to have any more to do with the old home; he had had quite enough home-sickness in his solitary cell. His childhood and youth had often come back to him, in fact almost every day. The Seven Houses came back to life and with them his family and friends and all the fun they had had together. The walls of his cell fell down, the Kahlenberg greeted him, the Leopoldsberg thrust its nose into the Danube and the Habsburgwarte gazed down on Vienna from the Hermannskogel. Lying on his iron bed, he could see a little patch of starry sky through the barred window high up in the wall, and when the clock of the church on the hill opposite the prison struck the hour in muffled tones, he thought he could hear the bells of the Brigittakirche.

Whatever the Seven Houses' folk had been, however petty and old-fashioned, he was bound up with them forever by the associations of his youth. They had set their mark upon him and it made him their slave. His dreams always carried him back to the years of his youth. Once again he flew through the air, his eyes fixed on Mr. Chiesi's upturned, red and smiling face, which in that position

always looked like a caricature. The excited throng under the net clapped him furiously as with his double somersault he swung himself back to the swinging trapeze.

In these dreams his father's kind face often appeared before him and he could see and hear his mother's pretty features and words of wisdom. Sometimes Rosl came before him and then the picture was variable; sometimes good and sometimes bad. Good when they sat by the banks of the Danube Canal and she kissed and cuddled him; bad when she stared at him with hatred in her eyes and her face was covered with a huge piece of sticking-plaster which reached from mouth to ear. She would raise her hand threateningly, and he recognized the blood-red scar and gazed as if spellbound at the stump of her little finger which he had cut with the sword. She vomitted forth horrible words and spat at him in contempt.

The day of his release had come and Hartl had finished with the past for ever. He had certainly hoped that his friends in Vienna would respect his wish to be left alone. And now Xaver Höllriegel had turned up. He suspected that Frau Höllriegel and Mitzi would also be found in Flensburg or Vienna. Probably his brother and sisters also.

His suspicions were only too well founded. Loisi and Mitzi were sitting in the restaurant at the station.

Frau Höllriegel put her arms round Hartl and kissed him. She kissed him long and tenderly, and he offered no resistance. Loisi was very fond of Hartl, but not quite certain about the nature of her feelings for the man who was fourteen years younger than herself. He reminded her forcibly of Ferdl Stiegler though he had never had the latter's ungovernable temper and possessed far finer feelings.

Hartl was correspondingly drawn to Loisi; she reminded him of his mother in so many ways.

Mitzi came up, threw her arms round his neck and gave him a soft, shy kiss.

"Hartl, I've got to kiss you for Rosa, Emilie and Adolf."

In the train to Altona, Puppy sat between Hartl and Mitzi. The dog kept looking up at her master and in her faithful eyes lurked the fear that he might leave her again.

"Are you coming with us to Vienna?" asked Loisi. "We've got a nice house with a big garden at Weidling am Bach; you can take a holiday there."

He shook his head.

"I shall, and must, make a new career first, Frau Höllriegel. It's quite impossible for me to be left alone with my own thoughts. I should go mad."

At Altona station he suddenly became extremely agitated. He remembered how, in spite of his protest, he had been chained to a low criminal from the police court cells and taken to the station with a great crowd looking on, and how all the passengers in the third-class waiting-room had stared at them in pity and contempt. Fresh fuel was thrown on the flames of his rage against Rosl. He had her to thank for all this! He had often found himself thinking about her and was always wondering whether he still loved her, a problem he was unable to solve.

"Hartl," sobbed Mitzi, "just think! Don't forget there's a girl in Vienna who's been praying and waiting for your return!"

He looked straight into her eyes. He did not deserve such love, as he had nothing but brotherly feelings for her. In his anxiety to spare her pain, he put his arm round her and spoke to her in low tones.

"Dear, kind, little Mitzi. I'm all upside down; I can't think clearly and I'm still seeing the bare walls and barred windows. I must first learn to forget them."

"Hartl, dear Hartl, I'm not ashamed to tell you I love you—ever, ever so much. Ever since I was a school kid I've been thinking about nothing but you and praying for you all the time. When you married Rosl I fell ill and wanted to die. A voice inside told me that Rosl would bring you no happiness. Don't be cross if I worry you, Hartl, but I've already suffered enough for you. Stay with me, my own boy, and you'll learn to love me. If you leave me again, Hartl, I shall die!"

Breathing hard, he gently stroked her soft and wavy hair.

"Don't be silly, Mitzerle; give me a short time. I'll write to you, and when I've quietened down inside, you must come to me, Mitzi. P'raps life's still got some happiness in store for me."

She looked at him with dreaming eyes.

"All right! Hartl. I'll wait for you, even if I have to wait till I'm a hundred; but be kind and write to me often and promise you'll never go back to Rosl. Promise!"

"You needn't worry about that, Mitzi. She's dead as far as I'm concerned."

The following day the Höllriegels returned to Vienna with Mitzi.

Hartl went to the station to see them off. Mitzi hung on his neck and covered his face with kisses.

"Don't forget me, Hartl, and promise to write."

He promised. She leaned out of the carriage window and again put up her mouth for a kiss.

"Don't think badly of me, Hartl, but I'm sure God'll never let so much love and sorrow be wasted for nothing."

"Write to us, Hartl," enjoined Frau Höllriegel. "Don't forget us. We'll all be praying for you and longing for the day of your return to us in Vienna."

She stared long into his eyes and pressed her hot lips to his mouth. Then shame suddenly overcame her as Hartl answered her gaze.

He stood for some time on the platform, looking at the air quivering over the hot rails.

"How hard life is," thought Hartl, "that I cannot give those who still love me the same affection in return." How kind all these people were! Mitzi, Loisi and the others; but the love in him had been killed and that was why he could not reward them with the same intensity of feeling.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

ON Rosl's initiative, Hartl's marriage with her was dissolved while he was in gaol. Hartl agreed on the divorce and undertook to continue the payment of the three hundred marks to her and Xaver. All Miss Harriet Buntrock's efforts to extract a considerable sum in cash, and keep the house, came to grief on the rock of the lawyer's obstinacy. The court recognized that three hundred marks was reasonable alimony and rejected all other claims.

The bad influence of the music-hall singer, under which the helpless Rosl had fallen, soon made itself felt. Before long the young woman had no will-power left. The Rosl who had once been so energetic, had slaved and waited for her lover, fought her way to him in a strange land and

triumphantly won his love, was now absolutely incapable of self-assertion. She meekly accepted all Miss Harriet's words and orders.

Rosl took a four-roomed flat in the "Neueburg". She hired a servant whom her friend recommended, plundered the house in the Elbechaussée of so much furniture that she could hardly find room for it in her flat, and brought her friend to live with her. Miss Harriet ate, drank and slept in Rosl's home without paying a penny. Xaverl, now a smart boy, was allowed to run wild. He missed the big garden and the river. He never ventured to ask Miss Simkins any questions, as her mother had often smacked him before on such occasions. If he mentioned his father, Rosl fell into a rage, and Miss Harriet screamed at him until he almost had convulsions.

"You haven't got a papa!" shrieked Miss Buntrock, "your father's a gaol-bird! He cut your mother about!"

"Yes, because mama lay in bed with Herr Kurt."

A resounding box on the ears from Harriet caused Xaver to yell lustily.

Rosl, for whom this act of execution was somewhat too abrupt, could not stand her friend punishing the boy.

"You mustn't smack him Harriet, I don't allow it!"

"A fine fellow your son will grow up, seeing that he is slinging your bedroom secrets in your face already," replied Harriet in scoffing tones.

Rosl often found herself willy-nilly thinking of her husband. In her heart of hearts her love for him was not dead, although she tried her hardest not to believe it. When she lay awake at night her conscience often tortured her, and then she decided to write to Hartl. She saw him lying in chains in gaol, wasted and care-worn, and heard him calling her name with his arms stretched out towards her. Then she would fling off the bed-clothes and run up and down the room, pressing her hands to her beating heart and calling:

"I'm coming Hartl, my own loved Hartl."

But when she awoke after these horrible nights, all the regrets and stings of conscience had fled, her thoughts were thoughts of evil. Every day the scars on her face and the wounds on her hands recalled Hartl's deed, and then her heart filled with passionate hatred. She also lived in constant fear that when her betrayed husband was released

he would attack her again, and this time certainly murder her. Thus Rosl alternated between love and hatred, and could not fathom her real feelings. Her evil genius was the singer, whose diseased mind was inspired by a passion to destroy. She fed Rosl's hatred against Hartl.

As the day approached for her husband's release, Rosl became increasingly nervous and agitated. Three days before the actual event, she went to Berlin with Xaver and hid herself in a *pension*. She felt like a hunted creature, and would only have been too glad to throw herself at her husband's feet, if her insane fear had not kept her back.

Rosl's peace of mind was destroyed for ever.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

MITZI'S first letter from Hartl arrived in Vienna from London three months after his release. Hartl wrote that he had not yet come to any decision with regard to his future, and still needed to take a long rest. A *poste-restante* address in London was given at the end of the letter. He went on to ask Mitzi to have patience with him as he was not yet reconciled to the new life.

Mitzi sent off her answer at once. She gave him comfort, and exhorted him to hold on. Not a word was said about her love, but merely that there would be great rejoicing in Vienna when he came back. Open arms were ready to receive him.

Hartl's second letter came from Valparaiso. In a few uncomplaining words the restless wanderer wrote that he intended to buy some land, cultivate it with native help, with a view to finding oblivion in solitude. Mitzi must forgive him for not writing at length. For the immediate future letters should be addressed to him, c/o the American Express Co., Valparaiso.

Mitzi replied that she would wait patiently.

After many months a third letter arrived.

Dear Mitzi,

I must and will confess my sins. Was there any wrong I did not do my poor parents? When I was a little boy I meant only sorrow and worry to them, and afterwards I ruthlessly broke their hearts, and caused them endless

suffering. My first punishment was the loss of all my peace of mind, which robbed me of all happiness. For a time I lived in fear that my dejection would degenerate into insanity.

Then the first woman came into my life, a beautiful and neglected woman. I brought her disaster. She died by her husband's hand.

An innocent little circus-girl pined to death for me at an early age.

I brought sorrow on Rosl too. It was my fault that she went wrong ; I ought never to have left a young and passionate creature like her so much alone. It was a great crime for me to have mutilated her in my fury, and I shall always have it on my conscience. I had no right to make myself her judge ; I ought to have given her her freedom.

In the long months of solitary confinement, I often wondered whether I still loved Rosl. I was not certain about my feelings towards her, and when I used to wander all day long in Altona after my release, everything reminded me of happy days. My love for Rosl came back irresistibly, and everything impelled me to return to her and the child. My little dog was my untiring companion on these walks, and when I found myself one evening in the Elbechaussée, at the gate of my former property, the little house in which I had suffered my greatest disaster, Puppy jumped up at the fence, barking merrily, and tried to get in.

To put an end to all these tortures I left the town and went to see my animals and say good-bye to them for ever.

The beasts, most unjustly described as stupid and bad-tempered, recognized me at once. They jumped up at the bars like mad things. Despite all the warnings I received, I went into their cages, and not one of my animals made even the slightest attempt to molest me. There was sorrow in their eyes. They seemed to be asking me why I had deserted them, and not kept my promise some day to supply them with enormous cages in my travelling-menagerie and support them in their old age, until they were called away to their animals' paradise.

I was not ashamed of my tears when I bade farewell to the loved creatures for ever. My only comfort was to know that I was leaving them in good hands.

This meeting with the companions of my long wanderings produced an increasing effect upon me. I felt sick in

body and mind. Thoughts of suicide took possession of me, and for months I could not keep them down.

In London everything reminded me once more of Rosl, and those first weeks of happiness.

I crossed the ocean on a steamer of the South American Line. A long sea voyage was to rescue me from my depression. In the smoking-room I made the acquaintance of a German officer, who made me come with him to the Argentine. He, too, seemed to have been driven from home by some secret sorrow.

In this tropical region, thirty miles from Atamisqui, on the bank of the Rio Salado, we have now acquired a large tract of land, and begun, with the help of natives, to till virgin soil with a view to going in for agriculture and cattle-rearing.

But all these months of hard work have not driven away torturing thoughts. My love for Rosl is dead. Nothing, not a single fibre of my being, binds me to her any longer.

I often think lots about you, dear Mitzi, in the few leisure hours I get. You must forgive me if I am very frank. I don't yet feel any love for you in my heart, though I am very, very fond of you as a sister. But there's nothing more. I must not chain any woman to me, as I bring disaster and death to all who love me. At the same time, I should hate you to go on grieving and worrying for me.

Dear, kind Mitzi! Look closely into your own heart, read this letter over and over again, and if you still think you can make me love you, come to me, and come quick. Stay with me as long as you like, we will have a testing time. Perhaps fortune will smile on me again. Surely anyone must be happy at your side, for you are kind and good, and pure in heart. I would thank you every day of my life if you managed to make me love you.

I shall be anxiously waiting for three months. I shall not get any answer from you earlier. If you come, tell me the time of your arrival so that I can meet you in Valparaiso. Give every one my very best wishes. Once again I ask you, consider everything very carefully.

With best greetings,

From your

"Brother" Hartl.

N.B. How are the Seven Houses getting on? Puppy is getting old, and never leaves my side.

Mitzi rushed out into the garden with a cry of delight, flung her arms round Loisi, whisked her round in circles, and thrust Hartl's letter into her hand.

"I'm going to put my hat on straight away, Aunt Loisi, and run down to the post to cable to Hartl that I am leaving by the next ship."

The cable was never destined to reach Hartl.

Mitzi decided to send her wire from the Central Telegraph Office in Vienna. She took the local railway from Klosterneuburg. Geza Földvary, *alias* Sammy Kohn, and an international pickpocket, sat next to Mitzi, who was lost in thoughts. He opened the girl's bag, drew out several hundred krona notes and Hartl's letter, and left the train at Nursdorf station.

Great was Mitzi's horror when she discovered the loss of the letter. She rushed home from Heiligenstadt. The letter was not to be found. She reported to the police, inquired at lost property offices, had bills posted, and advertised in the papers, but all in vain. The letter, containing Hartl's address, had gone for ever.

Geza Földvary had read the letter, torn it up in little pieces, and let the fragments fall into the Danube Canal.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

HARTL'S thoughts turned more and more to Mitzi and he was seized by a passionate longing for a sympathetic soul.

That Mitzi should come was his heart-felt wish and daily prayer, and notwithstanding the torrid heat he rode every week to the post office which was many miles away. As the three months slipped by and still no answer came from Vienna, he became exceedingly impatient.

The time seemed endless, but he did not give up hope of hearing from Mitzi. Suddenly the idea struck him that she was already on her way to the Argentine and would be with him very shortly.

During the torrential tropical rains the two colonists had been busy with their lands in erecting a dam to keep the raging waters of the Rio Salado, which was rising every

hour, between their banks and away from the fields where the crops were now fully grown.

It had been pouring for days without stopping. The streams from the mountains, swollen to rushing rivers, swept down to the valleys, carrying everything with them in their mad career, and ruthlessly removing all obstacles. The young plantation and the new settlement were in great danger.

The river rose higher and higher and the position became more threatening from moment to moment.

The hands drew the attention of Hartl and Asmus, his colleague, to the fact that not only their property, but the very lives of each and all were in imminent peril.

The waters ate into the land and surged over the low-lying sugar-cane plantations. The dam began to give way at various points, and portions were carried away. Enormous tree-trunks drove down-stream, wedged themselves in the masonry, destroyed parapets and sandbags, and created a gaping hole which let in the river. The men's warning shout called Hartl back. He was on dry ground in three bounds, and then an Indian yelled out, and pointed to the foaming waters.

With terror in his heart, Hartl saw that Puppy was being carried down by the stream. She had not been quick enough in following her master, at whose side she was running. Without stopping to think, Hartl pulled off his heavy boots and sprung into the raging flood.

The dog struggled in vain to reach the bank. The circling eddies whirled her round and carried her into the middle of the river.

Striking out vigorously, and evading the great tree-trunks, Hartl swam on, or let himself drive with the stream. As he came near to Puppy, he called out her name. The little creature put forth a mighty effort to swim against the current.

A few strokes more and Hartl had reached his little favourite, who was now almost exhausted. With one hand he lifted her on his back, then he swam towards the bank. The river had become enormously wide, and Hartl felt how much he was hindered by his clothes.

Asmus and the plantation hands, armed with rifles, ran along the bank. The danger from the water was great enough even for so powerful a swimmer, but a far more

serious peril was represented by the alligators with which the river was alive.

After a hard struggle lasting several minutes, Hartl reached shallower water. As he approached the bank, in an exhausted condition, a shot rang out: he heard a splash behind him, turned round, and jumped aside just in time to avoid a terrific blow from the tail of the giant alligator which had just been hit. The voracious beasts came up from all sides. Shot after shot whizzed past Hartl, as he leapt towards the bank, holding Puppy in his arms, and often falling in the water. Helping hands pulled him ashore while the bullets from the farm-hands' rifles crashed into the open jaws of some of the monsters who had come too close.

Hartl lay for weeks in the delirium of a high fever. Asmus gave his comrade the most tender care, and knew no relief until one day his patient looked at him with clear, questioning eyes. Memory came slowly back.

"Thank God, you have come round at last!"

The tropical sun blazed down on the veranda outside the window which was closed with a mosquito belt. Hartl's gaze turned to his friend. Puppy, at the foot of the bed, fixed her master with her bright eyes.

"You've been lying there for six and a half weeks; seem to have swallowed a bit too much water."

Hartl repeated in amazement.

"Six and a half weeks?" and though he felt how limp his whole body was, he sat up with a jerk. "Is there . . . are there any letters for me?"

Ashins shook his head. He noticed that the news had upset his friend, and silently left the room.

The buzzing of the mosquitos, Puppy's snores, and Hartl's laboured breathing were for a long time the only sounds inside the hut.

At length he pulled himself together, sat on the edge of the bed, and thought things out. An answer from Mitzi should have arrived long ago: he started suddenly, suppose something had happened to her? but surely in that case Frau Höllriegel would have written to him.

Three days later Hartl had his horse saddled, and his belongings packed on a mule, and announced to the astonished Asmus:

"Don't be angry, old man, I am giving you everything as it stands. I'll have my share put into your name, so that everything will be yours."

"You don't mean to say you're throwing up the sponge for a bit of illness?" growled the ex-Guards officer, "do you think it's any fun for me staying on here alone, and accepting presents from you?"

"I am not leaving you because of my illness, it's something else." Hartl hesitated a moment. "I've lost the last thread of hope that kept me bound to a decent existence. Let me go my way, Hans Georg. Perhaps I'll come back to you some day."

His friend looked at him and understood.

"Forgive me for judging you wrongly, Richardl. Devil take all the women on earth, and if one of those bearers of ill-fortune sticks her nose in here, I'd throw her to the alligators.

Puppy squatted in the saddle in front of Hartl and barked at the leader ahead.

The sure-footed horses plodded along tracks, sometimes only a foot wide, with a yawning precipice below. Richardl Gürtler sat in the hard saddle with his eyes fixed on the ground and cared nought for where or how he went. It would have been a matter of indifference to him if his horses' hoofs had slipped and they had all been flung into the abyss. A star of hope, Mitzi, had shone in the sky. He had come to believe that her love was strong and that the same feeling would descend upon him and make him its slave. He had been thinking for some time that love for Mitzi was awakening within him. And now his soul was in blackest night, a night all the blacker because of the blazing sun and cloudless sky. There was nothing but unending night before him. Twilight suddenly came upon them. The leader stopped and told Hartl it would be better to stay there for the night, as otherwise the panthers and pumas might easily find a dainty meal.

Two fires were kindled and the green wood crackled gloriously, sending up curious clouds of smoke, and spreading the acrid odour of resin. The horses were turned out to graze, and were soon engaged in snapping off the young shoots from tree and bush, and tugging thick tufts of juicy grass out of the ground.

Hartl sat motionless. A volcano was raging within him. The hand of the Lord had fallen upon him once again, the fourth commandment, which enjoins love for father and mother, and which he had madly stamped under foot, was the most moral of the ten. He had multiplied the griefs of his own poor mother, who had known nothing but suffering for most of her last years, and how could he doubt that he was guilty of her sudden death! She must have known of his crime against Rosl! Death! The idea had often obsessed him. Perhaps it was the only proper way. The man who said that suicide was the act of a coward did not know what he was talking about. Self-destruction is the most courageous act a human being can perform.

Before he said farewell to life, he meant to enjoy it. He had never hankered after the pleasures of this world, but he meant to find out whether any comfort was to be found in them. In the trees, the bushes, the air and the soil, something was always rustling, fluttering, creeping, flying and burrowing. Life was everywhere. In nature there was no end to it, the earth fixed every day and second of the day and night.

A shooting star blazed through the sky, leaving its track of light and heat. The old tradition had it that every wish uttered at that moment would be fulfilled.

What Hartl wished for was death, a painful death, such a death as he had seen overtaking victims of the plague in the tropics. But Fate is not to be controlled by puny man; it bids us wait for death, and meanwhile bear the burden of life in silence.

A feeling of great tiredness overwhelmed the wanderer, and nature came into her rights. His head dropped forward, and his deep breathing, punctuated by gentle moans, showed that he was asleep.

His little dog crept up, looked at her master, and when she had satisfied herself that he was fast asleep, rolled herself into a ball between his legs and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

MITZI was in utter despair. She racked her brain day and night, to try and remember the addresss given by Hartl in the lost letter. In Herr Höllriegel's

library, she studied a large map of South America, examining the area labelled Argentine, with a magnifying glass, inch by inch. All in vain.

The months went by and no further letters came from Hartl.

Yielding to Mitzi's insistence, Xaver Höllriegel wrote to Hamburg. Hartl's lawyer replied that six months before, his client had had all his money—with the exception of five thousand marks for Rosl's alimony and legal expenses, sent to Paul Taussig's Banking and Shipping Office, Arrman Bank Building, Corner of 14th Street, 4th Avenue, New York City, U.S.A.

Without wasting any time, Mitzi went to the post office, and sent a cablegram to Taussig, asking for Richardl Gürtler's address.

The answer arrived next day.

Richard Gürtler's address unknown.
Taussig Bank.

Her inquiries about Hartl in theatrical circles were equally unsuccessful; he had disappeared, and no one could find him.

Yet hope persisted in Mitzi's loving heart. She could never bring herself to believe that Hartl would not come to her again. She rejected all Adolf's advances and professions, took a post as governess in a private school for foreign languages, and studied in her spare time, so as to increase her knowledge.

She built an altar beneath her picture of Hartl. He was her god, and to him she prayed.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

A SAILOR came slowly round the corner of the Davidstrasse, and walked along the Spielbudenplatz. In the extensive square, booths and stalls were packed like sardines. Shouting individuals used the full force of their lungs to drown the sounds of steam-organs and bells.

The Christmas fair.

Every year, from the first Sunday in December to the Christmas holidays, there was great rejoicing and jollification in Hamburg. It is the great fair of the year.

A theatrical fair as well. The best turns are put on in all the great music and concert halls. From all the corners of the earth, come the agents and managers, intent on fixing up their programmes for a whole season, and stealing each other's best "Acts".

The Heiligengeistfeld is one great city of enormous booths. In the Spielbudenplatz the best shows are given, above all the Punch and Judy show.

The sailor walked past the Grossebierhalle, Naucke's, Hein Kollisch, and the Bodega. He threw away the burning stump of a cigar, and bit off the end of a fresh, black Brazilian. He struck a match, on his trousers, but when it was half-way to his cigar, he stopped, listened, raised his eyes and looked ahead. Opposite the entrance to Panopticum was a blaze of light indicating the front of a show-booth ; while, notwithstanding the December cold, parrots and parroquets were swinging on rings and trapezes. A monkey tugged at the leather thong falling from the clapper of a bell, and a parrot was laughing like a human being and shrieking at intervals :

"Merde, Merde." Then it sang two lines of a song.

"Je suis toujours
Comme il faut."

and burst out laughing again.

A clown, with his face painted white, and his nose painted blue, waved his hands in the air, and bawled out, in the voice of a cheerful tippler :

"Walk up, walk up, ladies and gentleman ! Wallenta's Royal Belgian Travelling Circus with its thirty trained Shetland Ponies. Hundreds of dogs and monkeys and almost one thousand exotic birds ! The only thing of its kind in the world ! New tricks, never shown before ! Walk up, walk up ! The performance is beginning at once. Only three groschen for entry. Walk up, walk up !"

The announcer stopped. His eyes were fixed on a man, and he stood there with his mouth open. Then he recovered himself, and jumped down the four steps in such haste that the monkey was terrified, and pulled desperately at the leather thong.

"Hartl, my boy ! My boy ! How are you ? My boy ! My boy ! What *have* you been doing with yourself ? I'm delighted to see you !"

The sailor stared coldly at the clown, and removed his white gloved hand from his coat.

"You've made a mistake, haven't you? I don't understand a word you say." Once again Schorsch began to gape like any village idiot, but only for a moment, and then he caught hold of the sailor's coat again, and said:

"What are you splashing English with me for? Don't you know me? I'm Schorsch who used to be with you at Thima's, and then Wallenta's! Wake up, man, stop fooling!"

A little old gentleman came out of the booth by the pay-box. He looked down inquiringly, spied his announcer, and called out:

"Georg!"

Schorsch turned round in terror and ran up the steps.

"D'you know who that is down there, sir? It's Hartl Gürtler; years ago he got up the nigger act with me, and forgot everything the moment he got on the stage. Afterwards he had the big wild-animal show, and then he got sent to quod for trying to swipe out his girl with a gun."

"I'm not concerned with that."

Hartl, for it was he, had meanwhile fled. He was furious with himself for giving way to his inclination to see Schorsch and the old show again, spectacles which had no pleasant associations for him.

It was six years since he had left the Argentine, six long years.

In the course of one year, spent in the New York slums, San Francisco's China-town and London's Limehouse, he had got through his whole fortune—more than eight thousand pounds. A sort of mania had descended upon him. He flung his money about with lavish hand, picked up prostitutes and bullies in large restaurants, made them drunk, carried on like a madman when any woman tried to caress him, and advised them all to leave him severely alone. He himself hardly drank at all, but he never had a cigar out of his mouth. The harlots fell in love with him, and tried to annex him. All they did was to frighten him and, once rejected, they never ventured to approach him again. He had finished with the past and was but the wreck of his former self. Even the bullies did not venture to strike up an association with him. When he was angry,

he behaved like a madman; he seemed to develop the strength of a giant, and boxed like a professional.

Both waiters and restaurant-keepers went about in fear of him; if his wishes were not carried out at once, he would often clear the whole room. His outbursts had several times brought him into contact with the police in New York, Chicago and 'Frisco, but he always succeeded in getting out of his scrapes with a fine.

Often enough, in the solitude of his miserable lodgings, he decided to turn over a new leaf. He would think of his dead parents, his brother and sisters, and the old home in Vienna. Memories of childhood came back, and the Seven Houses took shape before his eyes. He would fling himself on the bed, clench his fists, and repent bitterly of his evil deeds.

When he thought of Rosl and Mitzi, he would curse aloud, and throw himself into some new adventure. He thought of Rosl far less than of Mitzi, and his rage against the girl who had brought new hope into his heart and then brutally left him without an answer, was greater than his hatred of Rosl. In his calmer moments it seemed to him curious that he so seldom thought of his boy, Xaver, that he actually could not remember what he looked like; it was as if the child had never existed.

Before the year was out, the eight thousand pounds had given out, and Hartl was as penniless as when he left the hospital in Bucharest. He had nothing but his simple room, far out in the suburbs, at Golders Green.

He had once been so fond of London, for there he had spent the happiest days of his life with the exception of his childhood.

When he passed Scotts, grief unutterable assailed him. He had often sat in the restaurant with Rosl, listening to her amusing chatter. How often had she secretly squeezed his hand under the table, or pinched his leg, and then burst out laughing.

By a great effort of will he banished all such thoughts. He wanted to have done with the past for ever. He avoided Leicester Square and the Empire Theatre. But the past was always coming back to torture him, and now that he was penniless there was only one course open to him—to go as far away as possible from all the places which were reopening old wounds. The idea of suicide had

ceased to interest him. He sold all his belongings with the exception of a few small articles, bought a sailor's kit-bag, went down to the West India Docks, and signed on as a trimmer on a ship of the United Fruit Line.

Year after year Hartl traversed all the waters of the earth. From trimming he changed to stoking, and then became an ordinary seaman. For three years he was a sailor on a large English four-master, which was engaged in carrying Chilian nitrate from the West Coast of South America to England.

Six years of life before the mast did not succeed in banishing all the dark old thoughts from Hartl's mind. Whenever his ship came into harbour his money burned in his pocket.

Hamburg he avoided ; he never took any job on a ship going to German ports. When he was on passenger steamers he would sometimes come out of the red-hell of the stoke-hole to take an airing, and his eyes would go up to the boat-decks where the passengers reclined in their deck-chairs, or amused themselves with shuffle-board and quoits. He thought of the times when he himself had travelled, a smart young man, as a first-class passenger. Then rage ungovernable would seize him, and time and time again he would wonder whether his sin had been great enough for God to punish him so terribly.

At such moments nothing would have pleased him more than that a mighty storm should arise and hurl the ship to the bottom of the seas. He even played with the idea of sinking the ship himself.

On the sailing ship, Hartl knew more peace of mind. There were no passengers, as no one ever thought of travelling by these slow craft, reeking of sulphur and nitrate, or risking his skin in rounding the perilous Cape Horn.

When a storm raged and the barometer fell as low as it could, and the wind-indicator pointed to "twelve", "hurricane", Hartl's eyes glowed with a fierce joy. The raging elements, air and water, corresponded to the tumultuous forces within him, and he wanted them to bear him and his ship away with them to hell.

A month earlier there had been a catastrophe to the great four-master in the middle-Atlantic.

For nine days they had been driven about rudderless at

the mercy of the raging waters. The storm had smashed the masts like so many twigs ; three sailors, Hartl among them, were swept overboard by the sails. Then a miracle happened. A wave carried him back on board, and the boatswain's mate drew him into safety. The storm gradually tore the ship to pieces, it sprang a leak, heeled over to larboard, and yet did not sink. The hold was water-tight, and kept the wreck above water. Four more men were washed overboard, and the others died of exhaustion, with the solitary exception of Hartl, who was rescued by the Hamburg-Süd-Amerika steamer *Amazonas*.

Although he had managed to preserve his papers and few possessions, Hartl assumed a false name, lest the world should know that the sole survivor of the four-masted schooner *Albatros* was Richardl Gürtler.

He took the name of the drowned ship's carpenter, Lars Larsen, and the newspapers duly announced that the only human soul to be saved from the wreck of the *Albatros* was Lars Larsen, of Thurö, Bogensee, Denmark.

The *Amazonas* continued her voyage to Hamburg. Hartl quickly recovered in the ship's hospital and begged the staff to keep away all inquisitive passengers, particularly women.

The white snowflakes began to fall soft and thick from the sky. Hartl turned up the collar of his coat and trudged across to the Café Hammonia. He looked timidly into its brightly-lit windows.

The old theatrical haunt had not changed. Within its walls there congregated daily all those who had the whole world for their home ; all those who wandered restlessly over the face of the globe, year in and year out automatically repeating the same performance every evening and often twice a day. These theatrical folk were people who had every opportunity of enlarging their horizon by keeping their eyes open, and yet they seldom if ever attained to any vision of the beautiful or developed and extended their mental faculties. They were ignorant of everything save the show in which they appeared, the lodgings in which they slept, and the restaurant or café in which they met their kind to exchange the same old fatuous remarks, lie about their earnings and vaunt the merits of their own achievements.

Hartl replaced his cigar, which had been extinguished by the snow. He meant to drive out all thoughts which incessantly assailed his peace of mind.

On the Heiligengeistfeld everything was in full swing. Steam-organs shrieked at each other. The odour of Dutch waffles mingled with the smell of rancid fat from pork sausages and horseflesh. On all sides invitations were shouted to lotteries, dice-throwing and ring-shies.

The prizes displayed made the women eager to secure a jug, alarm-clock or some other article. Pickpockets moved boldly among the throng, furtively seeking where the careless visitors kept their purses.

There was a glorious medley of laughing and strong language.

Hartl walked on through Hamburg's streets. He came to a standstill in front of Sagebiels Theatre, and read the names of all the artistes who would appear in the bill between 6 p.m. and midnight. One item in particular caught his eye.

"Mr. Philadelphia" and his performing elephants!

Hartl's heart beat faster. Memories of old times came back. Soliman! Soliman, the giant elephant which had been so fond of him and was always caressing him with its trunk. He was seized with an overwhelming desire to see Soliman again. Would the animal recognize him, and if so, would it love him still?

Thrusting a mark into the doorkeeper's hand, he asked him:

"Where are Mr. Philadelphia's elephants?"

"Eighth door on the right." In the dim yard he soon found the elephants' stalls; while still some distance away, he could hear them snorting and tugging at their chains. He approached cautiously. After a moment's hesitation, he knocked on the door with his fist and listened. There was no answer. He swiftly pulled at the latch and entered the place, to be greeted by a heavy animal odour.

He stood still and looked round. Which was Soliman? Was that old Mira? If so, the beast by the wall must be Soliman in his usual place. The animal in question had begun to swing its head from side to side, when the stranger entered, but otherwise did not move. Could it scent its old friend? It seemed so. Hartl's heart beat furiously. He called out Soliman's name in low tones.

Trumpeting loudly, waving its trunk, rattling its chain and stamping its feet, the pachyderm answered. In considerable trepidity, Hartl squeezed along the wall to the animal's head:

"Soliman, good old Soliman, d'you know me again, good old fellow?" The trunk passed over his face inspecting his eyes and forehead.

Soliman and Puppy! Soliman and Puppy! His two loyal friends.

Five years had passed since, stricken with grief, he had buried Puppy in San Francisco, after spending fourteen days and nights nursing his loyal little comrade. She had succumbed to inflammation of the intestines. Even as she died she had fixed her big faithful eyes upon him in silent pleading, and licked his hand. He had buried her behind the Golden Gate Hotel, and for days had not left the house.

He had not been ashamed of his tears then, and he was not ashamed of them now. His only friends had been animals, he laid his cheek against the rough trunk, then clenched his teeth, tore himself away, and rushed out of the stall. As he ran through the yard, he could hear Soliman stamping and trumpeting—his farewell.

Hartl struggled back to St. Pauli. The snow had stopped. Drunken sailors were fighting outside a gin-palace, and from the Winterhaus came the clash of cymbals, and the strains of violins united in the Rakoczi March.

Poor tattered creatures with sunken cheeks and hungry eyes were creeping into the Concordia, the drinking den of the poorest of the poor. At the Nobistor, the boundary between Hamburg and Altona, two women of the streets were engaged in pulling each other's hair, and exchanging obscene abuse.

Hartl continued up the Neueburg, and passed Bachstrasse, until he came to a row of bright lights.

"Kongerthaus Altona" was inscribed over the doors and on the windows. A large placard announced that five-and-twenty beauties were assembled on the stage, and that the entrance fee was only thirty pfennig. At the door stood an attendant in a gold-braided red coat; he had a huge moustache and feet of incredible size. Hartl went up to one of the big windows, climbed on the ledge and looked into a hall lit by hundreds of lamps. The attendant came up.

"Get down, or I'll break your neck."

"Hold your mouth," replied Hartl. "Here's a mark for you ; don't interfere !"

The owner of the moustache wobbled back to the door on his colossal feet.

Hartl got up on the window-sill and looked in again.

At the back, between the right and left gangway was a platform which projected several yards into the body of the hall.

Upon it about twenty females, dressed in brightly-coloured butterfly costumes, were seated in a semi-circle. To the left of them a hook-nosed youth was strumming on a piano, while a funny little fellow with a false nose hopped up and down, opening and shutting his mouth like a fish out of water, and pulling horrible faces. After a while the fellow left the stage to the accompaniment of much applause.

Hartl could now observe the ladies on the platform more closely. Suddenly his eyes remained fixed in his head. He peered through the window. His breath seemed to stop. Was that not Rosl sitting there among the performers ? Again he took a closer look, and then he frowned.

Yes, indeed, it was she. In spite of the paint and powder he could see that she had a scar right across her face.

It was Rosl, once his wife, Now she rose from her seat, and slipped forward. She was repeating something with awkward movements, and mechanical gestures. She was still lovely, but more developed and womanly. Her eyes gazed sadly into space, and a melancholy smile played round her lips.

"Poor Rosl," whispered Hartl, "you've sunk very low."

He called the attendant.

"Here, who's that woman singing now ?"

"Oh, that's 'Bella Rosy'. She's the English girl from Vienna."

"Has she been here long ?"

"Yes, she's been singing here for at least three, and possibly four years."

"Is she married ?" asked Hartl.

"Many times."

The moustache wagged, and a row of broken and tobacco-stained teeth became visible.

"She was really married once and her hubby, who was

an animal trainer, caught her with another man and chopped her face about for her. She's running round now with that woman, Harriet."

"Hasn't she a child?"

"You seem to know a mighty lot about her. Yes, she's got a boy, and a pretty smart chap he is!"

"Where does she live?"

"I think it's up the other side, but when there's no one to give her a bottle of beer for her supper, she has to go round begging anywhere."

Hartl took one more look through the window. Rosl was now dancing in circles round the stage, holding a walking-stick in front of her with both hands. The audience, holding each other's hands, and beating time, joined in. The ditty could be heard out in the street.

"Ich bin ein Mädchen
Von Rasse,
From Whitechapel,
Von Klasse.
I am smart, I am not silly,
I am a girl from Piccadilly,
Ich bin engelsch,
Ich hab'neu Spleen,
I am a lady,
Dor kaunst op speen. . . ."

In his little room in the sailor's home in the Kastanienassee Hartl lay under the coverlet of blue and white check. His cigar, which had long been out, was still hanging from the corner of his mouth, and his hands were clasped behind his head. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

Was it in the nature of things that people of the lower-classes should always be forced back to the rank from which they came? Only in a few exceptional cases did they manage to hold their rise.

He had come from simple and honest folk, who were half-peasants and half-shopkeepers. Why had he not stayed at home? Why, in any event, had he not stopped with "Kron and Neutra"? Why had he been so unhappy with them, and wanted to go out into the wide world again? Why had his dear, kind mother let him go back to Chiesi, though it almost broke her heart? Would he not have been happier as a metal-turner? If he had stayed on with them, he would have married Rosl Stollhof then. They would have lived together in the Seven Houses. He

would have passed a placid, modest existence in Rosl's parlour and kitchen, and his wife would never have fallen into temptation. Hartl bit his lips. A curse seemed to rest on the sons of the Gürtler family. Maxl had killed himself through a girl; Iguaz had become a restless wanderer on the face of the earth, as the result of a woman's treachery, and ruined himself for love of her; and he, Hartl, had Rosl to thank for losing his moral backbone, and finding himself in prison, herded with thieves, murderers and other criminals. Mitzi's hateful conduct had thrust him into depths of misery from which there was no return.

Women had proved the undoing of the Gürtler boys.

Who could say whether Adolf would fare any better? He ought to be warned! But was it too late already?

How hard life was! The world was full of men who had to go on paying for the sin of Adam and Eve. It was one long round of struggle and sorrow. All over the earth, God's children were thinking that their own sufferings were the greatest and their own burdens were the hardest to bear. Hatred and envy on every side, and the things over which men fought—instead of loving each other—were usually vile, but often enough merely absurd.

"Love never ceaseth," says the Holy Book. "Love one another," said Christ the Lord. "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden," were His sweet words. But men hated each other instead of putting into practice those sacred precepts which were impressed upon their minds in earliest childhood. They turned love to fleshy lusts, and called it love.

Could not men learn to lighten the burden of life, and really love each other?

From these reflections the lonely wanderer was suddenly called back to the present. A drunken sailor was singing lustily, though sadly out of tune, in the next room:

"Zu jener Zeit, wie liebt ich dich mein Leben
Ich hätt' geküsst die Spur von deinem Tritt,
Hätt' gerne alles für dich hingegeben
Und dennoch du, den hast mich nie geliebt."

Hartl pulled the coverlet over his face, drew the pillow round his head and clenched his teeth.

Next morning he signed on as an ordinary seaman in a whaler leaving for the Antarctic.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

MITZI'S deep mourning made a violent contrast to the pallor of her face.

She was in mourning for Hartl and good Herr Höllriegel, who had been buried in the old family vault in Hietzing Cemetery a few weeks before.

Mitzi had joined Loisi at Weidling am Bach. The two women lived together, cherishing common memories of all the love they had lost.

When the news of Richardl Gürtler's death had appeared in the papers some months back—in the depth of winter—Mitzi had utterly collapsed and been seriously ill for a long time.

Xaver Höllriegel made inquiries as to whether the announcement really referred to Richardl Gürtler, born at Meisling in the Waldviertel, and received an answer from the Marine Bureau in Hamburg that there was no mistake.

In her delirium, Mitzi was always calling on her beloved. When she recovered, her face was the face of a Madonna ; her eyes shone with an unearthly light and her features were chiselled in stone. She laid bare her heart to Loisi, and the latter, with tears in her eyes, confessed that though she was years older than Hartl, she had cherished a sinful love for him. This passion, subconscious at first and then asserting itself violently in London, had become almost uncontrollable when she saw Hartl again in Hamburg after his release from gaol. It had taken her years to fight it down. It had been terribly hard for her to live with kind Xaver Höllriegel, whom she revered as a saint, while this sinful passion tore her heart. Not even Ferdl Stiegler had she loved so greatly. But now she had conquered, and if the thought had once filled her with shame it had now lost all its impure and unholy elements.

"There have been times when I couldn't look in your eyes, Mitzi, when you were talking about Hartl ; I was afraid of giving myself away to you."

"Dear Aunt Loisi, I knew it ; but I never thought it was so strong."

"When he kissed me good-bye in Vienna, it was all I could do not to run away with him. Years after, that kiss

was still burning on my lips. I think Xaver suspected something, but he was so kind and tactful, and he loved me so dearly. Even in such a thing as that he understood me better than I understood myself."

"I don't know now why he became a sailor and never wrote again."

"Perhaps he couldn't forget Rosl after all?"

"I don't think that, Auntie Loisi. He never got over the blow, but his love for Rosl was absolutely dead."

Loisi wiped the tears from her eyes.

When there had been no news of Hartl for years and investigation had proved fruitless, Mitzi had succeeded in persuading Herr Höllriegel to cross the seas with her and make inquiries of all the emigration and settlement authorities. After weeks of endeavour in which Buenos Aires, La Plata, Rosario and Cordoba were thoroughly combed, they learned from the German Consul in Cordoba that, several years before, a man of the name of Richardl Gürtler had joined with a certain Herr Asmus in purchasing some land.

A few days later, Mitzi and Xaver Höllriegel called on Asmus.

"I take it that he left here on your account," he said. "He was certainly expecting a letter from you for three months. Richardl Gürtler never had letters before."

Mitzi had returned home inconsolable.

Years went by, and no news of the missing man came to hand till the day when, like a bolt from the blue, the report of Hartl's death reached Vienna.

"To think that he wandered about, bearing his sorrows by himself all these years and without a soul to help him! Alone in the world and dying in the pride of his manhood! God give him rest!"

"I often feel that Hartl isn't really dead. He comes to me in my dreams. He once came to the garden gate and looked at me ever so hard, as if he wanted to ask me something. Then he sat down in the grandfather chair and went on staring and staring at me. His face was quite brown with sunburn and he held a blue sailor's cap in his hand. I couldn't get a single word out. Then he got up and went out again."

"You dream about him at night because you're always thinking about him by day."

"But, Auntie, it's often happened that people have disappeared and then come back again."

"When a man's at the bottom of the Atlantic, he won't come back again!"

"But how do they know for certain that he's drowned? P'raps he was picked up by another ship and he's now lying ill in Africa or South America, and won't write as he used to. I've often read in the papers how shipwrecked mariners have sent news of themselves years and years after."

"God grant you may be right. But I can't believe it."

"Well, I won't give up hope until I've seen Hartl lying dead before me!"

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

"IT'LL be ten years to-morrow since we got engaged in Valparaiso. Do you know how frightened I was of coming out into a desert?"

Asmus nodded with a laugh as he ripped off the last sheet from the German calendar on the wall.

"The year's out, as far as I'm concerned, though there's still two hours to midnight."

The tall, fair woman smiled softly.

"You talk about 'desert', Renate. Why, when you came there was a big town compared with what it was like when Richardl Gürtler and I first arrived. At the start we lived in tents, and afterwards in miserable huts. And now we've a fine great house and our children."

"What's become of your friend?"

"He's rotting somewhere, God knows where. I only wish I knew why he went off so suddenly. There's some woman behind it all. He took nothing with him but his dog and his clothes. Gave me everything. I've never heard a word from him since."

"What was his job?"

"I don't know, even now. He never talked about it. He must have had a pretty lively past. He'd been all over the world and knew eight or nine languages."

"Was he nice?"

"Yes, though he didn't say much. He did most of his talking to his dog, which he loved as a child. The little beast was extraordinarily intelligent and returned its master's affection with interest. It never left his side and he risked his own life for it when he saved it from drowning in the flood."

"Odd, very odd."

"He seemed to have a mysterious power over animals. All the dogs and horses followed him about. One day the Indians brought him a full-grown puma, an extremely savage brute. Richardl Gürtler tamed it in no time and used to play with it just the same as with his dog."

"Odd, very odd," repeated Frau Renate.

The *vacqueros* and workmen were singing and drinking down by the river.

It was New Year's Eve, the night on which men always hope that the bad days are over and the New Year will bring better times.

The twang of guitars could be heard mingling with the melancholy drone of voices.

Torches blazed at the top of poles and from wires hung Chinese lanterns.

A large, shaggy, yellow dog came bounding out of the wood, wagging its tail. A shepherd saw the animal, yelled out and drew his revolver. He thought that some ferocious beast of the woods was about to attack the settlement.

"*Alto, alto, ahi!*"* came the voice of a man on horseback coming down the mountain path through the forest with a pack-pony in tow. "*No tal!*"†

All heads were turned towards the new arrival.

"Is Señor Asmus in?"

"*Ya, Señor,*" replied many voices.

The rider turned his horse's head towards the house on the hill. He looked around him in amazement, particularly at the embanked river, at one side of which a smart steamer was moored. On the farther side a new settlement had arisen. To right and left of the proprietor's house were dwelling-houses and store-houses and there was a rope-way from the settlement over the hill.

"Here Soliman!" cried the stranger, as a large number

* "Stop that! Stop that!"

† "Drop it!"

of dogs, barking furiously, came rushing out of the fenced terraces.

Asmus came out of the house, and whistled the dogs back. A little negro came running forward and snatched the horse's reins.

"*Asmus?*" The stranger's voice sounded more cheerful.

"Richardl Gürtler! You! Renate, come here quick, Richardl Gürtler's here!"

Thoroughly taken aback, Hartl stood facing the tall, fair woman. She looked at him inquisitively, and put out a friendly hand.

"Forgive me," said Hartl to his friend, "I didn't know you were married, or I wouldn't have disturbed you."

"But why should that frighten you? We were only talking about you a few minutes ago, and worrying about what had become of you."

The black servant put wine on the table. Hartl kept his eyes fixed on the ground. His face was very tanned, and he would have looked like a foreigner if it had not been for his thick eyebrows which had almost been bleached white by the sun. His hair was dark. The skin of his sunburnt hands was rough, and his finger-nails were broken. He had grown broader in the shoulders, though his figure remained spare and wiry. There was a look of sadness in his deep-set eyes.

"I thought you were still alone, and wanted to come back to you. You needn't fear I've come to claim back my share."

"But what's all this nonsense about, Richardl? If you intended to stay here, you needn't be frightened away because I am married. In any case I don't think you'll want to stay when I tell you what's happened in your absence."

And Asmus told him of the visit of Mitzi and Herr Höllriegel, the lost—or rather stolen—letter; Mitzi's despair and determination, and her futile journey.

At Hartl's feet lay the shaggy Esquimo dog, with its eyes fixed on its master. It got up, and laid its fine head on his knee.

The restless wanderer sat with bowed head; conflicting feelings were at work in his breast. What was this new evil he had done? What a trick his impatience had played upon him! Everything he ever did went wrong. He raised

his head and gazed vaguely at the distance, while his home appeared before his mind's eye. He saw his mother, father and their children gathered together, while little Mitzi stood by the window, and fixed her eyes upon him.

Before daybreak Hartl had bidden Asmus farewell.

"I am going back home, hoping to restore everything I have destroyed."

"And whatever happens, Richardl, there's always a home for you here."

Lost in thought, Hartl took the same road, along which he had once passed in blank despair.

"Fifteen years!" He softly whispered the words. He was forty-seven and had spent the last three and a half years on a whaler in the seas round Greenland. When he was paid off he was tired of seafaring. A few months later the eternal wanderer landed in Valparaiso. Homesickness for Vienna and the Seven Houses had seized hold of him, but he did not return there. Then he suddenly decided to return to Asmus and end his days with him.

Yet now he was on the way to Cordoba with the fixed intention of reaching Buenos Aires or La Plata by rail through the Argentine and taking the first ship for Europe.

CHAPTER FIFTY

THE rectangular slip of paper trembled in Frau Höllriegel's hand. Was it really true? Was Richardl Gürtler still alive? So all Mitzi's clairvoyant dreams had proved that there was such a thing as a sixth sense. Loisi ran through the telegram again, repeating it under her breath:

> "Arriving in Hamburg by steamer *Cap Trafalga*, March 10th. Send wireless whether all well and sound. Hartl."

The news would have to be broken to Mitzi carefully. She would not be back from the city until the afternoon. Frau Höllriegel thought it would be better to let Hartl's sisters know first.

Loisi drove her car at a breakneck speed from Weidling

am Bach to Sievering. Hartl's sisters sat with open mouths when they heard the latest news.

"Is it true," stuttered Emilie, "that our brother Hartl is alive, and not drowned after all?"

"There must be a God," whispered Rosa; "oh, if we could only hear something of Ignaz, too!"

The sun shone down over the hills in the west, and the reflection of the window-frames stood out sharply on the light-blue carpet in Mitzi's room. On the table lay Hartl's telegram. Time and time again Mitzi caught hold of the paper, and read its short message.

"I could never bring myself to believe that Hartl was dead," she whispered. All her dreams, by day and by night, came back to her. Was there really something like second sight? Had not her visions always filled her with new hopes? Could one doubt that they had been messages from Hartl? Messages sent by him from thousands of miles away, arriving quicker than a wireless message, and confirming her in her confidence that he was still alive. Only that morning she had been lying in bed while it was still dark, and it suddenly seemed to her as if the front wall had dissolved, and in its place was a thick white mist. The mist lifted, and a great ship became visible; Hartl was leaning over the side smiling merrily, smiling merrily as he used to in the old days, and whistling shrilly with two fingers in his mouth. Then the fog vanished, and Hartl in the flesh stood in the window, and stretched out his arms towards her.

And now the dream was a certainty. Hartl was alive and returning home! Home to her! It was not too late. She was nearly forty, but she could have many happy years still.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

HARTL had to wait three long weeks before the *Cap Trafalgar* same into La Plata; three weeks of fidgeting and irritating suspense. He thought a good deal about the old days; and memories of his son, too, came back to him. Xaver must now be over twenty. What had become of him? The thought that he had

cared nothing about his child all these years was torture to him. He must make inquiries. He translated intention into deed, by sending a long cablegram to his former lawyer in Hamburg. The post from Europe arrived on the day the *Cap Trafalgar* set sail. Hartl opened the letter in his cabin and read:

DEAR HERR GURTLER,

It seems very strange to hear from you. I send you my somewhat belated congratulations on your wonderful survival from the wreck. There was a general rumour that you were dead, and the newspapers confirmed it.

Why have you not let us have any news of you for so long? A sum of more than five hundred marks has been lying here in the Norddeutschen Bank for years—the remains of the money you put at my disposal. Of course, I only kept up the payments for your son's support until his sixteenth year. As I have said, the above sum represents what is left, and I can forward the money to you at your request. Interest for several years will be added to it.

Your former wife left Altona five years ago. I cannot tell you what has become of your son, and the police reports do not show where your wife went to. I learned that Frau Rosl Gürtler has been appearing for years as a singer, in small halls, but unfortunately I could ascertain nothing further.

I should like very much to see you again.

With kind regards.

So Rosl had remained on the music halls. As regards his son, he would have to make inquiries for himself. It seemed to him very odd that he had no warmer feelings for him; it made him ashamed of himself, but in no wise altered the fact. His affection for Rosl, too, was completely extinguished.

The days at sea passed very slowly. He had provided himself with something to read in La Plata, but found it quite impossible to spend much time with a book. As on his old voyages with Mr. Philadelphia, he had had his deck-chair put between the boats on the boat-deck, and he took no interest whatever in the other passengers.

First thing in the morning, before the others had left their cabins, he ran fifteen to twenty times round the promenade deck to get some exercise. He was the last to appear in the saloon, and left it long before the other passengers rose from table. His neighbour was the First Officer, a talkative gentleman, who received answers, and those very brief. At lunch one day the officer suddenly turned to Hartl and said :

"By the way, I've forgotten to tell you that we've got a namesake of yours on board, a young engineer, the Fourth, I believe. Hartl replied :

"Gürtler's not a very uncommon name."

"It's uncommon in Germany," replied the officer, "this engineer is one of your countrymen."

Hartl helped himself to some Irish stew, and said nothing. Late one evening, a few days later, Hartl was leaning over the bow of the ship, and watching the phosphorous in the sea, when a voice, quite near, called out :

"Come down to the second-class smoking-room, Gürtler, and have a good stiff grog with me ; I can feel we're getting north, and it's darned cold to-night."

Hartl turned round when he heard his name ; he saw one of the ship's officers talking to a tall young man in uniform. The two disappeared. A strange feeling came over Hartl. Who was this young countryman who was travelling on a German ship ? After a second's hesitation, Hartl went up to the second-class smoking-room. He cast his eyes round the room, and discovered the two engineers sitting in a corner. He casually scrutinized the face of his namesake, to whom one of them raised his steaming glass, and said :

"Here's to you, Xaver, and may you learn how to laugh some day."

Breathing hard, Hartl leaned back in his seat. Xaver ! Could this young man really be his son ? The name of Gürtler was common enough, but it was an odd coincidence that this man should be called Xaver. He looked the young engineer up and down without the latter noticing anything particular. If this was his son, he must have some resemblance to himself or Rosl. Yes, the resemblance to Rosl was unmistakable, and even the colour of his hair was the same. It would be an extraordinary coincidence if he met

his son here upon the ocean. Why did not the call of the blood make itself heard?

It was a few days later when Richardl Gürtler succeeded in meeting his son on deck. He had meanwhile ascertained from the purser that the Fourth Engineer was the son of Rosl Gürtler, *neé* Stollhof, from Vienna.

Gazing back at the ship's foaming wake, Hartl asked:

"Is your name Xaver Gürtler?"

The young man looked steadily into his questioner's face and nodded.

"Forgive me for asking you what your father's name is."

The boy seemed astonished.

"My father is dead."

"What was his Christian name?"

"Richardl."

Hartl breathed hard. So it was his son after all! Fate had brought them together, In his heart of hearts he had known that his child was standing next to him.

"And wasn't your mother's name Rosl?"

"Yes, Rosl."

The young man's features began to show traces of something like fear. He glared in astonishment at his interlocutor's face. What did he want?

"You're Xaver Gürtler," Hartl resumed, then paused for a moment. "My name's Gürtler, too; perhaps we're related?"

"I'm certain we're not! I don't know my relations on my father's side."

"So you're not living in Vienna now?"

"Yes, we're living in Vienna, but we only went there a few years ago."

"Your parents?"

"No, only my mother, I just told you that my father's dead; he was drowned."

Hartl was silent for a moment; he was not certain whether to make himself known.

"Was he drowned when bathing?"

"No, he went down in a shipwreck."

"Oh, but it's often happened that a man's re-appeared after he's been supposed to be dead."

Xaver Gürtler felt that the questions of this sinister being who would not look him in the face were an insult to him.

"My father's dead, thank God!"

His words were pregnant with intense hatred.

Hartl looked up in surprise. What was the matter with the boy? Then he decided to reveal his identity.

"Your father isn't dead, Xaver Gürtler. I'm your father. I'm Richard Gürtler. I wasn't drowned, I'm still alive, as you can see for yourself."

Xaver stared in amazement at the man at his side, who was now looking straight into his eyes. He moved away sharply, half in fear. There was a photograph of his father on the wall. These were his eyes and bushy eyebrows, but his hair was black, This man's was grey.

"Yes, have a good look at me. I'm Richard Gürtler all right."

Xaver bit his lips and his eyes flashed at his father.

"I have no father, I tell you. My father was a good-for-nothing villain."

"Just a moment, my boy. Not quite so fast." Hartl was struggling for breath, but kept his self-control. "What's that you're saying? I'm not asking you to fall on my neck, but I can't stand that. Who's a good-for-nothing villain?"

"My father. He tried to murder my mother; behaved like a wild beast to her!"

Hartl's head dropped. Could he explain? Dare he tell his boy what his mother had done? He must say nothing. The lad must not lose his respect for his mother.

"If you *were* my father, I should tell you how much I hated you, hated and despised you! I'd curse you as my mother used to. She planted hatred in my heart and no one will ever be able to uproot it, though she has tried to change my feelings in recent years. If you really are my father, all I can say is that I'm very sorry."

Xaver walked away, without so much as a glance at his father.

Hartl stood there, shaken to the very depths. Rosl had brought the boy up in hatred of him. The wrong she had done him was not enough. She must poison the child's mind as well.

His son's words had hammered themselves into his brain. The past had come to life again. Would it never die? Was there no end to all these hateful memories?

A week later Hartl disembarked at Cuxhaven without having seen his son again.

On the quay stood Mitzi and Frau Höllriegel, examining all the passengers as they came down the gangway. Mitzi picked out Hartl the moment he appeared on deck. Disregarding the crowd around her, she called out:

"Hartl! Hartl!"

He could hear her call above all the noise, and his eyes searched among the throng on the quay. He first discovered the tall form of Loisi, whom he recognized notwithstanding her white hair, and then he saw Mitzi beckoning and gesticulating with both hands. She, too, was prematurely grey. His heart beat faster; he felt that the responsibility for all this must be laid at his door.

Wedged between passengers and stewards carrying luggage, Hartl could only get across the gangway step by step.

It was long before Mitzi and Hartl extricated themselves from each other's embrace, she clung to him desperately, as if afraid that everything was a dream which would once again dissolve into nothing.

Great was Loisi's welcome. She kissed Hartl and it seemed as if his mother had come to life again. He had the greatest difficulty in retaining self-control. He did not want to appear weak, but could not prevent his eyes from filling with tears.

On the railway journey to Vienna Hartl spoke little, but he was never tired of hearing and asking how his sisters and brother fared, what Vienna looked like, whether the Seven Houses still existed and were occupied by the same old crowd.

The nearer the train approached to Vienna, the greater became his agitation. He could not suppress his emotion as names familiar to his childhood roused old memories:

"Sankt Andrä Wördern", "Greifenstein", "Kritzendorf", conjured up visions of days gone by. He was moved to the depths and went out into the corridor. Mitzi started to follow him, but Loisi called her back.

"Leave him alone; he's got to find his bearings again and you'll only disturb him."

Placidly flowed the Danube. Its waters were green and

dotted with whirling eddies. High up on the hill by Leobendorf squatted Kreutzenstein Castle, on which the artistic Count Wilczek had lavished immense sums and patience illimitable in a recent restoration in the old "robber-baron" style.

Then came the town of Korneuburg and the Bisamberg. Hartl went back to his seat. Klosterneuburg Monastery appeared a frowning mass. The offshoot of the Leopoldsberg and the old building towered above the line.

Hartl got up and went out again. He did not want the others to see how greatly all this affected him. The years of absence and all the hard blows of fate had not been able to rob him of his soft-heartedness.

It was the atmosphere of Vienna—homesickness—which had him in its grip.

Beyond the canal was the beginning of Brigittenau, his special home and theatre of his youthful exploits. But what was this? A cluster of houses occupied the site of the beautiful Yägerau. Few trees were left. An enormous gasometer raised its ugly form. But Schiet's little inn with its high-pitched roof under the shady trees still lay hidden in its little corner below the level of the street. Ranstl's sinister house was still there, next to that of Safer the nurseryman—old Safer who used to be so rich.

Then a cluster of red-brick buildings—a factory.

Next the works of the building contractor. Everything just as of old.

But then the picture changed. Tenement houses, bare and ugly, towered on all sides. There was a new bridge over the Danube Canal. Rows of houses lined the Klosterneuburg Strasse, concealing that for which his eyes were seeking. They formed an impenetrable wall shutting out the Seven Houses.

Hartl sighed. The towers of the Brigitta Church soared into the sky, their coloured bricks making a gay pattern in the sunshine.

The windows became dark as the train ran into the station.

Everything was just the same. Hartl's brother and sisters stood waiting for the travellers. He was horrified at the emaciated appearance of Emilie and Rosa. His sisters flung their arms round him and kissed him. Outside the station the cabs were drawn up as in days of old. Motor

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The windows became dark as the train ran into the station.

Everything was just the same. Hartl's brother and sisters stood waiting for the travellers. He was horrified at the emaciated appearance of Emilie and Rosa. His sisters flung their arms round him and kissed him. Outside the station the cabs were drawn up as in days of old. Motor

cars and the electric-trams were a new feature. When he was last in Vienna, it possessed nothing but horse trams which clanged a bell as they went.

The cabbies yelled their familiar greeting:

"Cab, your Honour? Want a drive?"

During the drive to Weidling am Bach not a word was said. It was obvious that Hartl was wholly absorbed by his thoughts. Quite a number of people whom they passed cast a glance at the man with the tanned face and bushy white eyebrows.

Fate, destiny, had been everything in his life, Hartl was thinking.

Thima's Circus, Mr. Chiesi, the accident at Bucharest, the comic fiasco with Schorsch at Wallenta's, Mr. Philadelphia's elephants, women, girls, Rosl and what followed —all had been predestined.

He bore Xaver no grudge for treating him with hatred and contempt. The boy had drawn in the poison of hatred almost with his mother's milk. It was unforgiveable of Rosl to poison her child's young life. Even if Xaver's words showed that in later years she had tried to obliterate the effects on him of her wicked behaviour, the fact remained that the young man's heart would be filled with hatred for ever.

Women, women had been the ruin of himself and his elder brother. He had never been in the slightest degree responsible for women's fondness for him—indeed, in earlier years he had fought against it. The joy of pure love had been denied to the Gürtler boys.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

"YOU mean to say you talked to him like that! Your own father? Have you lost every spark of decent feeling, boy?"

"You've taught me to hate my father all these years; never tired of telling me what a bad man he was. And now you suddenly turn round and say it's all untrue."

Xaver Gürtler faced his mother in his smart uniform. He had obtained leave and travelled to Vienna, as he was

afraid his father would return to her and perhaps do her some injury.

Rosl held her head, in her hands. What should she say to her son. Should she confess her shame? She simply could not give herself away to her son. And she murmured —just as Mitzi had done:

"He's still alive; Hartl's still alive."

God's hand had been very heavy upon her. After her recovery, Harriet Buntrock had obtained such influence over her that she had simply taken all the men she handed on. She had sunk lower and lower. Music-hall life had brought her to the depths. Kurt Döring returned to Hamburg and tried to blackmail her. From sheer fear she lived three years with him, suffering all the horrors of hell upon earth. He was killed in a street accident. Then little Ungewritter ultimately rescued her from Harriet. She became his friend and when he grew tired of her he gave her an annuity and bought her a small business in the Wallensteinstrasse in Vienna—just to get her away from Altona.

She returned to her old home, which she had always kept on. When the corner flat, once occupied by the Gürtlers', fell vacant, she promptly took it, and decorated the front room with photos and mementos of Hartl. For many years she had been a prey to remorse and now she seldom spoke and was thoroughly tired of life. Hartl was the centre of all her thoughts and feelings. She worshipped her dead husband with a passion which bordered on the pathological.

Great had been her terror when on this very day Xaver had told her that Hartl was alive, and even greater was the blow when he said how he had broken with his father for ever.

Violent sobbing, a sobbing that brought relief, shook her whole body.

"There's not a word of truth in what I told you about your father. It isn't true; it's all a lie! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Xaver stared in consternation at his mother.

"But what about the scars on your face, and your missing finger? Is all that a lie, too, mother?"

"No, no, your father did it, but he was absolutely

justified. He ought to have killed me. I deserved it a thousand times."

Xaver went up to a photograph of his father, showing him surrounded by his animals. How strongly he resembled him! What had his mother done for his father to hack her about like that? What right could he have had to judge his mother? He was smitten with sympathy, fell on his knees, flung his arms round the weeping woman and kissed the tears from her eyes.

"Forgive me, mother. I'm terribly sorry for what I've done."

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

THE four women at Weidling am Bach worked like slaves. The house was done up and the garden put in order. It was July and the sun blazed fiercely, though thunderstorms arrived from the mountains every day and cooled the atmosphere.

Mitzi ran about busily from morning to night. Frau Höllriegel had put up the banns for the two lovers at the Brigitta Church. They should be married in the quarter where they had passed their happy childhood. The formalities were protracted as the name of Richard Gürtler, reported dead, had been struck off the registers of his birthplace. Papers could not be issued to a dead man, much less could he be allowed to marry.

The bell-ringers tugged vigorously at the ropes, and the tower shivered under the metallic fury of the clanging bells. Their iron tongues were telling Brigittenau the news that one of her true-born sons was linking his fate for ever with that of an equally true-born daughter.

It was no young couple who knelt at the altar, and yet the myrtle of maidenhood wreathed the brows of the bride. She had carried her love in her heart since she was twelve years old, remained chaste and unsullied; now, after many long years she was giving her hand to the object of her love. Her "yes" rang down the great nave.

An old bowed woman knelt at the font behind a pillar. She was the first wife of the man at the altar, a wife who in youthful folly and passion had trodden her happiness

underfoot. The tears ran down Rosl's face; she clasped her hands convulsively and clenched her teeth to prevent her sobs being heard.

The Feast of St. Anne had come round again. The Feast of St. Anne! It was nearly forty years to-day since Ferdl Stiegler had run a knife into his body falling downstairs—and a little boy had secretly run away from home and wandered about the dark streets of Vienna. His path of suffering had stretched into the years—an endless Calvary.

The Feast of St. Anne was still celebrated on the Kahlenberg, but Stuwer was long since dead, though when some firework went off there were still many aged Viennese who whispered:

"Bravo, Stuwer!"

The bridal pair made their way to the Seven Houses after the quiet wedding-breakfast at Sacher's was over. Loisi and Hartl's sisters and brother occupied the second carriage.

The Burghardtgasse was immensely changed. There were now eight houses on one side. An equally ugly tenement house had been built on to the Seventh House in which Hartl and Mitzi had spent their childhood. The meadows and maize-fields on the opposite side had vanished. The site was occupied by a tram depot and adjacent tenements. The tenants of the Seven Houses had lost their view over the hills.

Hartl and Mitzi looked up to the two corner windows and told the chauffeur to stop. A light was burning in the room.

"Just think, Hartl," said Mitzi, "how often I've looked out of that window waiting for you to come home in your apprentice days."

He nodded, put his arm round her and kissed her on the forehead.

"Yes; I was in love with you then, but I didn't know it."

"We're very healthy, Hartl, and have lots of lovely years before us yet. You're so young still."

He looked up to the lighted window again. "I wonder who's living in our place now?"

The chauffeur drove on.

Above, in the Gürtlers' old home, Rosl was kneeling in

prayer before a chest of drawers on which a figure of the Madonna with the Infant Jesus was standing in a glass case. She was praying for Hartl's happiness—and for his forgiveness, too. She rose wearily, went to the table and turned down the wick of the oil lamp.

The last light in the Seven Houses went out.

THE END